The Master and Mrs. Wharton: Film Adaptations of the work of Edith Wharton and Henry James

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Abstract

This thesis is an examination of six films adapted between 1993 and 2000 from novels by Henry James and Edith Wharton: James's The Wings of the Dove, The Golden Bowl, The Portrait of a Lady and Wharton's The Age of Innocence, The House of Mirth and The Buccaneers. All six films have been claimed as part of the costume drama/literary adaptation/heritage genre. The analysis of this cycle of adaptations focuses on the visual expression of four key themes: wealth, desire, decorum and social mobility. Dress and art are deployed within the visual fabric of these adaptations as symbolic objects that make up what Wharton termed the "hieroglyphic world" of society. In this cycle of films, the use of art and dress constitutes a new way of viewing costume and art as elements of the adaptation process. Barthes's aspect of the third meaning, "the passage from language to significance" is conveyed through dress and art as sites of visual meaning, a concept that is also deployed by James and Wharton in their fiction. The mise-en-scene of these six adaptations draws inspiration from a variety of artistic influences, ranging from the paintings of John Singer Sargent and James Tissot to the influence of early cinema and photography. Clothing plays an intrinsic role in both the novels and the film adaptations, in terms of displaying consumption, social class and character, and it also makes up the iconic images created by stars who take on key roles, such as Helen Bonham Carter's portrayal of Kate Croy as a "heritage noir" (cf. Church Gibson, 2000) femme fatale in the film of The Wings of the Dove. James and Wharton's narratives represent an expression of the 'transcultural aesthetic' making their fiction particularly apt for cinematic adaptation in an era of increased global mobility. This concept of the transcultural aesthetic is vital in attempting to widen the debate on 'heritage' cinema. While these films and novels share textual themes rooted in settings ranging from the late 1870s through to the early1900s, the narratives are adapted in ways that make James and Wharton relevant to contemporary cinema audiences, while also reminding us of the timelessness of James and Wharton's narratives.

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Dedication

To George, for his love and for making all the images look their best. To my parents, without whose love and support my studies would not have been possible

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Chapter 1: 'Recording the Status Life' Why Adapt Edith Wharton and Henry James?

When Ian Christie interviewed Martin Scorsese about his experience of adapting one of the most well-known film adaptations in this study, Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* many critics and fans viewed costume drama as a departure for the director famous for his gritty depictions of urban violence and survival, while others felt the story and the attention to detail it dictates, were perfectly suited to Scorsese's style. Tellingly, *The Godfather* films, *Goodfellas* and *Casino* are never described as costume or period drama, even though all these films are set in eras other than the one in which the film was made. Intriguingly, Scorsese cites the popularity of Merchant Ivory's adaptation of E.M. Forster's *A Room with a View* as one of the reasons that he decided to make *The Age of Innocence.* (Christie 2001: 67) He also expresses a delight in the amount of detail required by costume films, particularly in the case of adapting Wharton's novel because "what seems to be description is in fact a clear picture of that culture, built up block by block." (Scorsese as quoted in Christie 2001: 68) He stresses that the décor in *The Age of Innocence* "had to become a character for me" (Scorsese as quoted in Christie 2001: 68) and Stella Bruzzi confirms this link between *Age* and Scorsese's films about the Mafia in her chapter on the gangster film in *Undressing Cinema*: "In evoking the allure of wealth Scorsese, as he did with his adaptation of *The Age of Innocence*, fuses film style and narrative detail in *Goodfellas* and its virtual sequel *Casino* to create the spectacle of conspicuous consumption." (Bruzzi 1997: 83) These observations from Scorsese and Bruzzi acknowledge one of the foremost viewing pleasures accorded classic literary adaptations: the pleasure of observing and contemplating beautiful objects. My study proposes that the details of costume and setting are not only as integral to a film's plot as action and dialogue, but that the use of art and dress can constitute a key component of the process of adaptation. Barthes's concept of the third meaning, "the *passage* from language to *significance* and the

founding act of the filmic itself," (1977: 65) illuminates the way in which the six film adaptations I will examine use art and dress to compress a novel's descriptive passages into symbolic objects of visual and emotional significance. The six adaptations I will examine over the course of my thesis were adapted from novels by either Edith Wharton or Henry James and made between 1993 and 2000: Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* (1993), *The Buccaneers* (1995) and *The House of Mirth* (2000) and Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* (1996), *The Wings of the Dove* (1997) and *The Golden Bowl* (2000).

In the same interview, Scorsese explains that Wharton's novel deals with many themes visible in his other films:

> So, although this film deals with New York's 'aristocracy' and a period of New York history that has been neglected, and although it deals with codes and ritual, and with love that's not unrequited but unconsummated—which pretty much covers all the themes I usually deal with—when I read it, I didn't say, 'Oh good—all those themes are here.' I was just hit by the impact of the sequence near the end where Newland tries finally to tell his wife May he'd like to leave—and by her response. (Scorsese as quoted in Christie, 2001: 69)

Scorsese's use of the term 'sequence' where a writer or critic would have used the term 'passage' reveals the cinematic possibilities of the classic novel. The moment of Newland's attempted escape, and May's crushing of this escape with the veiled announcement of her pregnancy is a moment replete with visual potential, as much of the meaning and emotion in this scene is not conveyed by dialogue, but by glances, and postures:

> "Anyhow, I want to make a break—"
> "A break? To give up the law?"
> "To go away, at any rate—at once. On a long trip, ever so far off—away from everything—"
> He paused, conscious that he had failed in his attempt to speak with the indifference of a man who longs for a change, and is yet too weary to welcome it. Do what he would, the chord of eagerness vibrated.
> "Away from everything—" he repeated.
> "Ever so far? Where for instance?" she asked.
> "Oh I don't know. India—or Japan."

> She stood up, and as he sat with bent head, his chin propped on his hands, he felt her warmly and fragrantly hovering over him.
> "As far as that? But I'm afraid you can't, dear…" she said in an unsteady voice. "Not unless you'll take me with you." And then, as he was silent, she went on, in tones so clear and evenly-pitched that each separate syllable tapped like a little hammer on his brain: "That is, if the doctors will let me go…but I'm afraid they won't. For you see, Newland, I've been sure since this morning of something I've been so longing and hoping for—" (Wharton 1986: 342)

The adaptation employs Wharton's dialogue in this scene, but also infuses the action with a dark feeling of suffocation evoked by Daniel Day-Lewis's facial expression. (Figure10.1) Scorsese goes on to draw a comparison between Newland Archer's obsessive love for Ellen Olenska in *The Age of Innocence* and the obsessions of characters depicted in his films *Taxi Driver* and *Mean Streets*. He also says another reason he made *Age* was "the idea of that passion which involved such restraint," (Scorsese as quoted in Christie 2001: 70) a characteristic for which British heritage films are often praised or despised. (Higson 1996) Scorsese stresses the importance of moving away from talking about film in theatrical terms (Christie 2001: 71) and discussing it in terms of sequences, striving for a way to describe and discuss film that does not involve comparison in some way. And yet, he also says "for *The Age of Innocence*, I wanted to find a way of making something literary—and you know how America is cowed by the tyranny of the written word—also filmic." (Scorsese as quoted in Christie 2001: 71) Scorsese says his decision to employ the authorial voice-over that guides us through this particular film—a technique used by none of the other five adaptations—was "to give the audience the impression I had while reading the book." (Scorses as quoted in Christie 2001: 71) Few film critics really discuss the experience of reading when commenting on a film adaptation, and how a novel can impact someone as powerfully as a film, and how the two mediums interact in terms of adaptation, rather than simply how they compare to one another. In a 2002 special issue of *Screen* Belen Vidal Villasur asks "how does *the literary* work in contemporary cinema?" (2002: 8) I

believe that Scorsese is trying to answer this question with *The Age of Innocence*, and that all the adaptations I will examine over the course of this thesis attempt to articulate the answer to this question in a variety of ways. If we consider a novel as having the same potential emotional impact as a film, it does explain why viewers are often disappointed in the way a film depicts a novel. Film theorists and critics are often appalled at remakes of classic films, or films made in languages other than English that are then remade in Hollywood[1], much in the same way literary critics are at the filmed adaptations of novels. However, in my analysis I propose to examine novels and the films adapted from them as equal texts, drawing on a notion suggested by A. Robert Lee in the conclusion to his chapter on Scorsese's film of *The Age of Innocence:* "The upshot is that watching Scorsese watch Wharton, as in any great adaptation, we experience doubly: a text relived in film, a film become its own 'text.'" (1996: 177)

Edith Wharton, Henry James and the status life

Both Edith Wharton and Henry James were masters of "…what Tom Wolfe has called 'recording the status life'":

> This is the recording of everyday gestures, habits, manners, customs, styles of furniture, clothing, decoration, styles of traveling, eating, keeping house, modes of behaving toward children, servants, superiors, inferiors, peers, plus the various looks, glances, poses, styles of walking and other symbolic details that might exist within a scene…The recording of such details is not mere embroidery in prose. It lies as close to the center of the power of realism as any other device in literature. (as quoted in Tanner 2001: 296)

This idea of the status life, a life of wealth, privilege, and glamour has been a source of fascination for a long time. While James and Wharton are adepts in this field, there is a continuum of this type of writing that can be traced from Thackeray and Fielding, through to Rosamond Lehmann, and Françoise Sagan, to Candace Bushnell, Plum Sykes and the lesser known Tama Janowitz. The popularity of Bushnell's work (which

[1] Recent examples include 2004's *Wicker Park* (a remake of the 1996 French film *L'appartement),* 1993's *Assassin* (a remake of the 1990 French film *Nikita*) and 2005's *Assault on Precinct 13*, a remake of the 1976 Asian action classic.

references Wharton's and indeed, borrows heavily from it) and the successful transformation of her first novel into the television series *Sex and the City* confirms our cultural obsession with representations of the status life that includes novels, television and film. In addition to the six film adaptations of James and Wharton's work that appeared between 1993 and 2000, the years following the films saw the publication of previously undiscovered work by both James and Wharton: James's last completed novel *The Outcry* appeared in 2001, and 2004 saw a re-issue of his unfinished novel *The Ivory Tower* and a lavish illustrated edition of Wharton's travelogue *The Cruise of the Vanadis,* denoting a continuing interest in their literary work.

Over the course of my analysis, I demonstrate that Edith Wharton and Henry James were experts at exposing the underside to privilege, the disadvantages that can accompany the status life and that the film adaptations of their work manifest this in visually innovative ways. The themes that these two authors explore: wealth, desire, decorum and social mobility contribute to the sense that when reading James and Wharton, one is reading about the beginning of the modern world. The film adaptations represent a cultural return to James and Wharton's modern themes through films that employ specific visual strategies in their use of art, costume and mise-en-scene as symbolic objects that act as the locus for the condensation of James and Wharton's descriptive text, but in turn provide the viewer with additional layers of visual meaning. Jonathan Freedman, in his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Henry James*, confirms why James's work continues to be critically important and why I argue his work is filmed, so widely.

> Each successive wave of theoretical and critical practice—New Criticism, deconstruction, feminism, Marxism, New Historicism—staked their claims and exemplified their style of interpretation by offering powerful re-readings of James. And as critical insistences of our own decade have shifted to emphases on postcoloniality, critical race studies, the study of sexual dissidence, James has retained a powerful hold on readers and critics alike. (Freedman 1998: 1)

If James has been the crucible for a variety of contemporary cultural theories, then Wharton's potential remains largely untapped. As I will demonstrate in the following chapter on *The Age of Innocence,* Wharton's fiction provides a level of cultural analysis that is contemporaneous with Saussure's theory of the sign and predates Pierre Bourdieu's theories of taste and the symbolic object. This symbolic economy of society—which can be seen in all her fiction, but is particularly prominent in *The Age of Innocence*—is elegantly described by Wharton: "In reality, they all lived in a kind of hieroglyphic world where the real thing was never said or done or even thought, but only represented by a set of arbitrary signs." (1986: 44) Scorsese's film not only employs this key phrase in the narrator's voiceover, but its critical influence can be detected and appreciated in the film's use of costume and art objects. James's themes and characters also invite the viewer of the film or the reader of the novel to think critically. James challenged his readers when he published *The Wings of the Dove* in 1902, the first novel in his so-called late style, a novel that not only incorporated an emotionally dense style of writing, but a plot driven by love, greed, poverty, societal pressure, desire, disease, and social mobility, set in Venice and London. With all these elements, it is no wonder cultural critics return to James again and again. When Iain Softley's film adaptation of *The Wings of the Dove* appeared in 1997, it prompted a rush of criticism from both film and literature studies, criticism that has continued well into the twenty-first century.

Freedman also emphasizes James's focus on the theme of identity, how he sees it "…as something to be made, not something given, in a world where new possibilities of identity-formation are being conjured forth by an internationalizing economy organized by leisure, travel, and mass culture." (2002: 11) James and Wharton lived in an era of increasing modernity, a time when life was beginning to resemble our own global culture, and therefore their narratives have become increasingly pertinent,

thoughtfully exploring issues of heritage, national identity and social mobility. Many of their characters choose to redefine themselves through marriage, travel, or a change in social position but these things alter them in unexpected ways. The theme of displacement and how one's personal and national identities can shift over time and in accordance with major events, can be found throughout this cycle of novels and adaptations. Freedman says "…James' project of redefining identity transactionally, relationally—one might even say cosmopolitanally—ought neither to be denied or discounted." (2002: 12)

Millicent Bell, a scholar who has worked on both James and Wharton, in her introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton,* says even though Edith Wharton "was never obscure or forgotten" (1995: 1) "she was still reproached for being an accomplished writer." (1995: 3) Wharton's clear, precise style of writing and refined sense of irony appealed to her readers when she published her first book in 1902, and because her writing style has remained accessible, her work continues to be read, studied, and enjoyed. Like many women novelists of the past, she has been something of a reclaiming project for feminist literary criticism, though more nuanced accounts are now emerging. Wharton, like James, was "a historian of class shifts and of changes in manners." (Bell 1995: 15) Her most famous novel, *The Age of Innocence*, is a finely observed portrait of New York in the late 1870s, written in 1920, at a time when the appearance of the world and society was radically different from that of her youth. Her novels written and set in the 1920s, such as *Twilight Sleep*, perfectly capture the tone of that era as well. Though Edith Wharton herself did not embrace every new freedom—she divorced her husband, never remarried, and was both a war correspondent and charity worker during WWI, but did not see the necessity of women getting the vote—she chronicled it tirelessly in her fiction.

Edith Wharton, in many fine ways, is the perfect counterpoint to Henry James, her ruthless, concise observation balances his complexity of emotion, and perhaps this is why they proved such close friends in life. James and Wharton, as novelists and as individuals, were a part of culture in both America and Europe. Their work reflects and interacts with their dual identities and coincides with the increasing presence of popular culture and an emergent global culture, where people in Europe and America would be reading, wearing and discussing similar things, because there was discernable cultural influence and exchange via relatively affordable and efficient methods of communication and travel. In their novels, and in turn in the films adapted from these novels, Wharton and James allow us to see the pressure brought to bear by a desire for 'the status life.' Both authors had personal experience of this:

> It seems probable that Mrs. Wharton was herself a victim of the compulsion to 'make a good marriage;' her mother had been a poor relation of the immensely wealthy Rhinelanders until her marriage into the prosperous Jones family, and she probably urged upon her daughter the necessity of such choices. James, though a member of a family of some inherited wealth and certainly of social position, probably could not have afforded marriage. (Bell 1965: 241)

There are many reasons behind both authors' choices. It has been fairly well established that James was gay (see Edel 1996, Rowe 1998 and Bell 2004), and claimed he was "too good a bachelor to spoil." (Bell 1965:32) Edith Wharton remained married to her husband Teddy despite his declining mental health and flagrant spending until 1913, when she finally divorced him after years of living separately. After her divorce, Wharton began a long affair with Morton Fullerton, a respected judge and journalist who was a friend to both her and James. James maintained a series of intense friendships with a number of young men, but never married. Perhaps as a result of these experiences, their novels are peopled with characters whose sexual desires prove incompatible with their social position or financial status, and whose social and even national identities shift over the course of the narrative.

In James's and Wharton's stories, it is frequently the desire for status and wealth that motivates the characters. If a character is already wealthy, there is often a sense of responsibility towards this material wealth and how it ought to be dispensed, as with Isabel Archer and Adam Verver. If a character is poor, their rise through the ranks of society is often driven by financial need, and while this applies mainly to women like Kate Croy, Charlotte Stant, and Lily Bart, it also applies to Prince Amerigo, characters "expected to marry rich, forced to rely on looks and wit" (Bell 1965: 240)

In the following chapter, I begin with an analysis of the film of Wharton's *The Age of Innocence.* This chapter focuses on Wharton's key phrase 'the hieroglyphic world', and its relation to the theories of Pierre Bourdieu and Ferdinand de Saussure and how these ideas will act as a touchstone throughout the study. I also examine the ways in which the film interprets the narrative tone of the novel through a careful, symbolic use of James Tissot's paintings, and contrasting styles of dress for the female protagonists, May and Ellen. The third chapter provides an analysis of the sole television adaptation here, of Wharton's *The Buccaneers.* The differences inherent in adapting a novel for television as opposed to film, as well some of the difficulties in adapting an unfinished novel for television are debated, with a particular focus on the altered character of the Duke of Trevennick. The adaptation's recurrent, symbolic use of three paintings by Correggio provides a contrast to the Tissot-inspired visual style of dress and setting that *The Buccaneers* shares with *The Age of Innocence. The Buccaneers* is also remarkable for its thematic incorporation of contemporary British politics, and its political elements link it closely to Jane Campion's adaptation of James's *The Portrait of a Lady.* The fourth chapter deals with the perceived sexualisation of James adaptations and the reaction of James scholars to this element in Jane Campion's film of *The Portrait of a Lady.* Campion's deliberate use of an early cinema look and avant-garde techniques in the 'My Journey' sequence contrasts with

the other films' painterly aesthetic. The film adaptation of *Portrait* politicizes the female characters' desires through the insertion of a controversial ménage-a-trois sequence. The use of dress and hairstyle—particularly with regard to Nicole Kidman's performance as Isabel Archer— are made to demonstrate women's social oppression. The contentious choice of John Malkovich to play Gilbert Osmond, and reactions to perceived shifts in the character between novel and adaptation are also discussed. Chapter five deals with *The Wings of the Dove* as an example of heritage noir, particularly the adaptation's use of motifs associated with the vamp and femme fatale in Helena Bonham Carter's performance as Kate Croy. The film also employs a dominant colour scheme of blue and black, reflected in the costumes and mise-en-scene that act as a visual indicator of Kate's taste and influence on the other characters. This colour choice intersects with both John Singer Sargent's Venetian paintings and James's textual descriptions of Kate. The sixth chapter continues the discussion of the 'heritage' femme fatale with Laura Linney's performance as Bertha Dorset in the film of Wharton's *The House of Mirth.* This chapter also deals with the explicit use of a Sargentesque aesthetic, and how director Terence Davies openly acknowledged this influence on the adaptation. This painterly element is taken up in the costuming of Gillian Anderson as Lily Bart, through a comparison with Sargent's *Madame X* (1883-4) and *Ena and Betty, Daughters of Asher and Mrs. Wertheimer* (1901). The scene where Lily appears in a tableau vivant is a particularly significant sequence in both the novel and the film, as is her choice of subject, in relation to the film's painterly aesthetic and her position as a tragic heroine. This chapter also addresses Davies's technique of casting against type, particularly in his choice of Gillian Anderson as Lily Bart and Dan Ackroyd as Gus Trenor. The penultimate chapter examines the reputation of the Merchant Ivory team as proponents of heritage cinema and how their film of James's *The Golden Bowl* departs from their reputation as 'the Laura Ashley School of

filmmaking' through the symbolic use of Hans Holbein's portrait of Henry VIII and the insertion of an oriental ballet sequence. Uma Thurman's performance as Charlotte Stant shares certain key Orientalist visual motifs with the cinematic depiction of Kate Croy, linking early screen images of the vamp with the more contemporary femme fatale, and constituting an iconic style for the heritage femme fatale. Prince Amerigo, in his role as trophy husband, provides a contrast to many of the other adaptations' more traditional male characters. Adam Verver is compared with James's other collector figure, Gilbert Osmond and Nick Nolte's performance as Adam shares certain menacing traits with John Malkovich's performance as Osmond. The concluding chapter draws together Wharton's notion of the hieroglyphic world and the way in which these six film adaptations employ art and dress as symbolic objects that compress the descriptive text of James and Wharton, and also how visual objects that represent this condensation in turn present the viewer with an variety of additional meanings. The concept of a transcultural aesthetic of film adaptation and the past as shared inheritances are discussed as possible avenues for expanding the heritage cinema debate in a new, more inclusive direction. The transcultural aesthetic, already present in the work of James and Wharton, makes their work an ideal representation of this pluralistic notion of heritage, and I suggest further possibilities for the field of adaptation studies in the form of studying how classic literary texts are adapted from one language, and from one culture to another.

The themes that link together the six films and novels—desire, wealth, decorum and social mobility—are themes that transcend their era, and continue to appeal to a contemporary audience. Just as it was undoubtedly these elements that made Wharton's novels so popular as serials in magazines like *The Ladies Home Journal*, these are also the themes that attract film directors and screenwriters. Even James scholars have acknowledged the appeal of adapting these novels to the screen: "the plots are

melodramatic, really, and they're made for film." (Ozick as quoted in Wachtel 1998: 318) The suitability of James and Wharton for adaptation to the screen is not a recent phenomenon. Four of Wharton's novels were made into films in her lifetime: *The House of Mirth* (1918), *The Glimpses of the Moon* (1923) *The Age of Innocence* (1923) and *The Marriage Playground* (1929) (Costanzo Cahir 2003 and The Edith Wharton Society webpage). *The Age of Innocence* was adapted again in 1934, and her short story *Bread upon the Waters* was adapted in 1935 under the title *Strange Wives.* Her short story *The Old Maid* was made into a film starring Bette Davis in 1939, *The Children* was made into a film in 1990 and her novel *Ethan Frome* was adapted into a film in 1992. There have also been several television adaptations of Edith Wharton's work: *Ethan From* (1960), *The House of Mirth* (1981), *Summer* (1981), *The Lady's Maid's Bell* (1983) and *The Reef* (1997 under the title *Passion's Way*). According to the Internet Movie Database and The Edith Wharton Society webpage, all the television adaptations are currently unavailable, with the exception of the 1960 *Ethan Frome,* which may only be viewed in the archive of the Museum of Broadcasting in New York City. Although I searched for almost a year, I was unable to locate a copy of *The Children*, and much as I would have been fascinated to view a selection of adaptations from previous eras—particularly the silent film adaptations of Wharton—many of the older films were difficult, if not impossible to obtain when I embarked on my research[2].

J. Sarah Koch's 2002 filmography of Henry James lists 125 film and television adaptations of his work, with the earliest dating from 1933. There were several reasons why I chose to focus my research on six recent adaptations. Primarily, I was interested in how James and Wharton were being interpreted now; how their particular themes and

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[2] According to the Edith Wharton Society website, the following early Wharton adaptations are all unavailable on either VHS or DVD: *The Age of Innocence* (1923) *The Age of Innocence* (1934) *The Marriage Playground* (1929), *The Glimpses of the Moon* (1923), *The House of Mirth* (1918) *Strange Wives* (1935)

characters were being embodied as we made our way towards the 21st century. Having seen the six selected adaptations more or less as they emerged in the cinema and on television, I was struck by their visual texture, the way they employed colour, costume and art not merely as surfaces, but as elements that could be symbolically rich. I was also interested in the way these films refused to fit neatly into the categories of costume drama or heritage cinema. I have omitted the 1992 film adaptation of *Ethan Frome* from my study because it differs significantly from much of Wharton's other work. *Ethan Frome* has a rural setting and the characters are poor, and therefore it did not fit into the milieu of wealth and privilege that I chose to explore in this sample of films. The older Wharton adaptations that are available, the 1935 film of *The Old Maid* for example, is very much of its time, in that it draws out the qualities in the narrative common to the classic Hollywood melodrama. While the plots of these narratives remain—as Cynthia Ozick points out—"melodramatic" (Wachtel 1998) the acting in the six adaptations under discussion here is played for realism. When elements of melodrama do surface, as in the performance of *The Shaughraun* in *The Age of Innocence*, they are there to represent a cathartic outlet for the characters, and to act as a contrast to the realistic acting portrayed in the adaptation's dominant narrative. As Koch's filmography indicates, the sheer number of James adaptations would have proved unwieldy for this type of study. As with the older Wharton adaptations, the earlier James adaptations (though readily available on VHS and DVD) such as *The Lost Moment* (1947), *The Heiress* (1949) *The Europeans* (1979), and *The Bostonians* (1984), to name but a few of the more well-known examples, are also films of their time. Just as the six adaptations I analyse take up current cultural issues, these earlier films do the same and examining them within their own cultural and historical framework would constitute another project altogether.

As James and Wharton have been popular adaptation choices, they have also been the topic of a vast deal of literary criticism. Both are established authors with specialist journals devoted to the study of their work. Although I have included the work of literature scholars where it has proved illuminating, such as Clair Hughes's *Henry James and the Art of Dress* and Diane Price Herndl's work on fin-de-siècle images of the invalid, it is not the project of this thesis to provide an overview of the extensive secondary literature pertaining to these authors' oeuvre. What is lacking in terms of the writing about Wharton and James is criticism that approaches adaptations of their work from a screen studies perspective. Much of the writing about specific film adaptations of James and Wharton tends to approach them from a literary perspective. The author's familiarity with the text of the novel frequently takes precedence over an examination of the adaptation, resulting in criticism that dismisses the screen version and privileges the novel. This approach by literary scholars and proponents of fidelity criticism within film and television studies is something I have tried to do away with in my research by offering new possibilities for the way we may treat screen adaptations and novels in studies of this kind.

Adaptation

Although novels and film or television adaptations are both narrative forms, to adapt something for the screen is to break it up into scenes and dialogue, to tell it differently. Much of adaptation theory deals with the issue of fidelity, the problem of whether a film can be entirely faithful to a novel. Fidelity criticism often comes down on the side of the novel, because the perception remains that there is a scope to the medium of the novel that can never be captured by an adaptation. However, this theory rarely makes for fruitful discussion of either text. Most successful adaptations, judging by critical acclaim and audience popularity, depart significantly in some way from the original novel. This is not just in the interest of conforming to the time constraints of the

film medium or viewers' expectations of a certain level of televisuality, but also in the interest of inflecting the adaptation with a variety of influences specific to the era in which it is created.

Brian McFarlane's book *Novel to Film* provides an excellent introduction to the different approaches of adaptation theory, and although he focuses on film adaptations, his ideas can also be applied to television. McFarlane puts forth the idea that adaptation can function "...as an example of convergence among the arts", (1996: 10) and this seems a more useful approach than concentrating solely on the issue of fidelity. He also goes on to detail Geoffrey Wagner's idea of categories of adaptation: transposition, commentary, and analogy (1996: 10). Transposition denotes a faithful adaptation of the novel with little or no alteration; McFarlane's own example is the 1974 adaptation of Henry James's *Daisy Miller*. A commentary adaptation sees the novel "purposely or inadvertently altered in some respect" (McFarlane 1996: 10) to serve the agenda of the film; examples of this type of adaptation will be discussed in detail in later chapters and include Jane Campion's controversial *The Portrait of a Lady*, and Iain Softley's eroticised *The Wings of the Dove*. An analogical adaptation "...represent[s] a fairly considerable departure for the sake of making another work of art" (McFarlane 1996: 11) and examples of this include everything from Amy Heckerling's take on Jane Austen's *Emma* in her film *Clueless* to Philip Kauffman's version of the last days of the Marquis de Sade in *Quills*. McFarlane also introduces the idea of adaptation as deconstruction, "bringing to light the internal contradictions in seemingly perfectly coherent systems of thought." (1996: 22) Patricia Rozema's film *Mansfield Park* deconstructs Austen's novel by introducing material from Austen's early journals, and remodeling Austen's meekest, most hated heroine into an icon of postcolonial feminism. The television adaptation of Wharton's *The Buccaneers* can also be seen in

this way, as it incorporates substantial changes to character of the Duke, and a critique of contemporary British politics.

Classifying the Costume drama: Period? Literary adaptation? Heritage?

Classic novels chosen for adaptation are often interchangeably categorized under any or all of the following terms: costume drama, period drama, costume film, literary adaptation, classic novel adaptation, or the more recently coined term, heritage cinema. While 'period drama' seems to denote costume and setting of a previous era, 'heritage cinema' immediately implies a more political agenda at work. Andrew Higson, in his chapter "The Heritage Film and British Cinema," defines the characteristics of this type of film. Despite his admitted enjoyment of heritage cinema (his most frequently cited example is James Ivory's *Howard's End*), Higson feels "...such films operate primarily as middle-class quality products, somewhere between the art house and the mainstream." (1996: 233) Heritage cinema, according to Higson, is often made with the assistance of a well-established heritage industry of museums and historical sites which allow these films to evoke "...an elite, conservative vision of the national past...[and an] almost pervasive sense of loss, of nostalgia" (Higson 1996: 233) for a bygone era. Indeed, it is almost impossible to think of a British literary adaptation being made without the existence of organizations such as the National Trust, since it often provides actual locations, as well as archival information for filmmakers. However, one wonders what Higson would make of Chinese director Zhang Yimou's recent films about China's ancient, legendary past, *Hero* (2002) and *House of Flying Daggers* (2004) and how these films were made in a country with a considerably less nostalgic view of its heritage.

Higson acknowledges "all genres and cycles are hybrid categories" (1996: 234) and asks "is the heritage film distinct from other costume drama or period drama or

historical films, or is it a cycle within those genres? And what about its relation to the woman's picture, the quality literary adaptation, the television classic serial, soap opera, and the art-house film?" (1996: 234) These are all important considerations when looking at adaptation, particularly when looking at the recent adaptations of the work of Edith Wharton and Henry James. Higson focuses his attention on films made in Britain, but acknowledges that America has also produced heritage cinema, *The Age of Innocence* being a particular example. However, as with the earlier example of Scorsese's mafia films, it is interesting to note that films like *Gone with the Wind, Once Upon a Time in America, Titanic*, and *Gangs of New York* are rarely discussed in terms of heritage cinema or costume drama. Although Higson often makes gestures towards a more inclusive theory of filmed representations of the past, he continues to classify films with increasingly global, even transcultural (Halliwell 2000) production histories as 'British' or even 'English.' In his 2003 book *English Heritage, English Cinema* Higson identifies Jane Campion's film adaptation of *The Portrait of a Lady* as a British heritage film. While there are certainly aspects of *The Portrait of a Lady* that mark it as a kind of heritage cinema—its partly English setting and use of British actors John Gielgud and Richard E. Grant—it remains a film directed by a New Zealander, played predominantly by American or Australian actors, adapted from a novel by an anglicized American. As an adaptation classed as heritage cinema, *Portrait*'s political agenda is anything but conservative, and it lacks the nostalgic quality Higson applies (but rarely identifies explicitly) to the heritage genre.

The Portrait of a Lady fits in far more with Higson's critics' (see Dyer 2001, Monk 2001, Medhurst 2001, Villasur 2002 and Goode 2003) assertion that "heritage films…are often sites where otherwise marginal voices can be heard, where concerns often rendered peripheral in other cinemas are here given space—feminist concerns, gay concerns, concerns about identity generally, especially national identity." (Higson

1996: 244) This reflects the fact that many literary adaptations become a site for filmmakers to impose a variety of cultural influences and beliefs, working them into the narrative of the film, leaving their mark of interpretation on the film. This mark of interpretation is often the source of "...film versions of novels or of historical periods [being dismissed] because they are not true to the original." (Higson 1996: 245) But, Higson feels this harsh judgment reflects more on critics' inability to "...cope with populist rather than academic versions of history" (1996: 245) and speaks to an overall "fear of the popular" (1996: 245) in critical and film studies circles.

Higson's chapter "The Heritage Film and British Cinema" appeared in 1996, and his views reflected much of the tone towards costume drama and adaptation at the time. While others have expanded their perception of heritage cinema, Higson maintains his oddly reductive and somewhat colonialist opinions in his 2003 book *English Heritage, English Cinema*:

> That many of the films can thus seem interrogative and critical, exploring the underside of the often nostalgic vision, is perhaps not surprising since so many of the films are not made by upper middle-class English film-makers, but by directors and producers raised in other cultures. Inevitably, many such film-makers approach their subject-matter from a less than reverential position, from that of the outsider rather than the insider. (Higson 2003:29)

With this statement, rather than truly questioning the notion of heritage, or even dwelling on how it has been represented differently since the late 1980s and early 1990s, Higson simply succeeds in implying that any film about the British past that fails to purvey the kind of pernicious nostalgia he criticises, must be the work of an 'outsider', someone who does not come from the upper middle-class, or is at the very least unfamiliar with its mileu. It is interesting to note that in his 'selected filmography' in *English Heritage, English Cinema* he includes *The Wings of the Dove, The House of Mirth, The Portrait of a Lady,* and *The Golden Bowl.* By Higson's definition, both Wharton and James would be considered outsiders, and yet adaptations of their work

are included in a filmography entitled *'British' Costume Dramas of the 1980s and 1990s*. Wharton, an American who traveled extensively and eventually settled in France and wrote about American characters in America and Europe could not really be described as British, and yet Higson includes *The House of Mirth* in his filmography. Although James lived in England for many years, he never took British citizenship and is buried in America. James created English characters, as we see in *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Portrait of a Lady,* and to some extent in *The Golden Bowl.* Wharton's only major English characters are to be found in *The Buccaneers.* Although Higson inserts a disclaimer before his filmography stating that the British connection in some of these films is somewhat tenuous (Higson 2003:262) these distinctions continue to problematize notions of Britishness. One could, bearing this disclaimer in mind, almost see Higson's basis for including *Wings* in the filmography: Merton and Kate are both English characters, some of the film is set in London, Softley is a British director. In the case of *The Portrait of a Lady*, the beginning and ending of the film are set in England. In *The Golden Bowl,* most of the action takes place in and around London. *House* was shot in Scotland (though not set there) by a British director. I do not believe that Higson's brief, unexplored criteria provide an adequate justification for the inclusion of films that are adaptations of the work of outsiders, made and performed largely by outsiders. If the thrust of Higson's argument about heritage cinema is that these are films that present us with a rigid, conservative and largely undifferentiated vision of the British past, then surely films like *The Portrait of a Lady* would not conform to this description.

The words of Laura Testvalley in the television adaptation of *The Buccaneers* are particularly relevant here: "...outsiders have even less freedom. Well, one false move, particularly as a woman and one is consigned to oblivion," or in Higson's case, consigned to linger under the all-encompassing, though increasingly conflicted term

'British.' One of the great questions posed by James and Wharton's novels, and by these six adaptations is: What level of social conformity do we demand from outsiders? A more salient set of questions for Higson might be, just who are the English upper middle-class these days? Although Higson mentions the numerous films made by directors he considers 'outsiders' about the British past, even films that are not about the upper middle-class (Terence Davies's *Distant Voices, Still Lives* is often mentioned as an example of this), he fails to explicitly acknowledge the notion that heritage could encompass a diverse past[3]. Even films based on the work of 'outsiders' are glossed over with the term 'British.' John Orr, in "The Art of National Identity" provides an antidote to Higson's insularity by pointing out the diverse cultural background of the Merchant-Ivory team, who are nonetheless "gifted in the art of screening English fiction." (Orr 2000: 327) This undermines Higson's argument rather severely, as the films he considers most reverential towards the past are the work of outsiders.

In 2001 *Sight and Sound* published their *Film/Literature/Heritage* reader, a comprehensive collection of interviews, reviews, and critical articles dealing with many of the questions raised by Higson in "The Heritage Film and British Cinema." In her introduction to *Film/Literature/Heritage*, Ginette Vincendeau reveals, "...throughout this book, directors and screenwriters reflect on the joys, difficulties and sheer variety of adaptation and show that there is no 'formula.'" (2001: xii) There is no guaranteed method for a successful adaptation, but Vincendeau tells us "several writers and directors emphasise the importance of an 'osmosis' between themselves and the material they are adapting...[and that] the stronger the director's agenda, the more he or she pulls the adaptation towards their own concerns." (2001: xiii) This is the case with many adaptations that resonate with viewers and critics, just as the source material

[3] In his chapter "The Instability of the National" Higson does acknowledge "films like *My Beautiful Laundrette* (Stephen Frears 1985), *Bhaji on the Beach* (Gurinder Chadha 1993), *Trainspotting* (Danny Boyle, 1995) and *My Name is Joe* (Ken Loach 1998) articulate a much more ambivalent image of contemporary Britain." (38)

contains themes that continue to be of interest to readers, the adaptation incorporates them with the director's artistic vision. Vincendeau also stresses the prominence of postmodernism in recent literary adaptations, such as Baz Luhrman's *William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet*. The postmodern influence also "…discredits the idea of a pure originating text spawning debased copies" (2001: xvi) making the idea of enjoying the original novel, and the film adaptation perfectly acceptable, and clearing the way for new avenues of adaptation criticism of the kind I propose in this thesis.

Heritage cinema, as a genre rather than as Higson first identified it, a "cycle of films," follows this idea that adaptation theory is not just about comparing the fidelity between novel and screen. Vincendeau expands on Higson's definition of heritage cinema:

> Heritage cinema thus refers to costume films made in the past twenty years or so, usually based on 'popular classics' (Forster, Austen, Shakespeare, Balzac, Dumas, Hugo, Zola). The large majority are European, though in the 1990s productions evolved towards a greater internationalism, either pan-European, such as *Orlando*, or with large American participation… Heritage films are shot with high budgets and production values by A-list directors and they use stars, polished lighting and camerawork, many changes of décor and extras, well-researched interior designs, and classical or classically inspired music. Their lavish mise-en-scene typically displays the bourgeoisie or aristocracy. (Vincendeau 2001: xviii)

To Vincendeau's list of popular authors, we can certainly add Edith Wharton and Henry James. Like Higson, Vincendeau notes that heritage cinema has been criticized as politically conservative, while at the same time championed for its "ability to challenge mainstream representations of gender and sexuality."(Vincendeau 2001: xx)

Claire Monk, in her article "Sexuality and Heritage" in *Film/Literature/Heritage*, designates many recent costume films that have "an overt concern with sexuality and gender, particularly non-dominant gender and sexual identities…" (2001: 7) as 'post-heritage,' a trend she dates from Sally Potter's 1994

adaptation of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*. The post-heritage film also differs from its predecessors in its "...deep self-consciousness about how the past is represented." (Monk 2001:7) If we trace heritage cinema as it has been loosely identified by Higson and Monk, the 1980s gives us *A Room with a View*, a pleasantly faithful film version of Forster's novel, the story of an unconventional courtship that ends in marriage. In the mid-1990s, three of Jane Austen's novels are once more adapted for film or television[4], all largely faithful and entertaining, with the slight edge provided by barb-witted heroines. Suddenly, there is a shift away from sedate, faithful adaptations, a shift that first appeared in the 1995 BBC television adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* where "the series auteur was writer Andrew Davies, whose decision it was to allow Elizabeth Bennett to cavort around the countryside, Mr. Darcy to rise from his bath, and Lydia Bennett to disarm Mr. Collins with her cleavage." (Fuller "Cautionary Tale" 2001: 77) The trend becomes more pronounced with Iain Softley's 1997 film of *The Wings of the Dove*, which moves the setting ahead by almost ten years, and strips down the narrative to an ornate version of film noir. (Amini 1998: vi) Post-heritage cinema is exemplified by Patricia Rozema's *Mansfield Park* (1999), which alters the personality of the protagonist to make her more assertive, bases portions of the dialogue on Jane Austen's personal journals and correspondence, and addresses the postcolonial issues inherent in the original novel. However, the classification of heritage versus post-heritage can become quite chaotic. As Monk points out, *A Room with a View* fulfills her criteria for post-heritage, because of its homoerotic subtext and the heroine's journey of self-discovery, more fully than films she claims are post-heritage by nature of their release date. (2001: 9) Clearly, the definition and parameters of the term 'heritage cinema' are still up for debate. Andy Medhurst in "Dressing the Part", his contribution to *Film/Literature/Heritage*, focuses on the costume drama "as a means to become both

[4] Films of *Sense and Sensibility*, *Emma,* and *Persuasion* all appeared in 1996, as well as television adaptations of *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice* in 1995.

'other' and 'elsewhere', as a passionate manifestation of the wish to be different." (2001:12) He champions the idea of the costume drama as playful and melodramatic, the "cavalier approach to costume [that] has always dismayed the puritans." (2001:12) He questions the idea of a well-regarded adaptation such as Ang Lee's adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility*, criticizing it for remaining conservative in its approach to class. Medhurst discusses films such as *Restoration* (1996) and *Richard III* (1995), films he feels make better use of the costume drama/adaptation genre to address the convergence of current political issues—the rise of the extreme right (*Richard III*), or attitudes towards social responsibility (*Restoration*) for example—and the continuing relevance of the films' sources. Medhurst seeks to redress the critical place of those films "...where the past serves as playground, where a costume earns its place through impact not accuracy." (2001: 14) Medhurst's perspective creates a critical space in which to discuss Softley's *Wings* and Philip Saville's 1995 television adaptation of *The Buccaneers,* where a Tissot-inspired mise-en-scene does not preclude a critical political perspective.

Belen Vidal Villasur and Ian Goode propose less rigid definitions of both heritage and adaptation:

> For the critics of heritage, the 'past-as-present' mode in which some of these film narratives run cancels out the possibility of a critical view of the past. This angle, however, overlooks the many intertextual pleasures of period aesthetics, indispensable to contemporary 'classic' adaptations. (Vidal Villasur 2002: 6)

> ...the heritage film debate produces a dichotomy in which the generic heritage film is read within the national political context outlined by Higson and then challenged first by oppositional reading and second by the suggestion of the post-heritage film. One of the consequences of this critical framework is that the meaning and cultural sources of the 'heritage' that constitutes heritage cinema continue to be assumed and taken for granted. (Goode 2003: 296)

Although adaptations of the work of James and Wharton do rely on heritage properties and a depiction of a largely privileged past, they also represent another facet of the past: the expatriate experience, something both authors knew well as Europeanised Americans. Although wealth, breeding and social connections were what enabled them to leave America and build a life in another country, in the old world, they were able to powerfully articulate the experience of what it means to live abroad, to be a stranger, and the difficulty of finding social acceptance, particularly as people from a former British colony. These themes of the beginnings of globalisation and increased social mobility are also a facet of heritage, a facet that theorists like Higson are reluctant to acknowledge.

Diane Sadoff in "Appeals to Incalculability: Sex, Costume Drama and The Golden Bowl" argues against Higson's claim that heritage cinema is synonymous with cloying nostalgia and the absence of irony:

> James's novel [*The Golden Bowl*] and the 1990s James films, however, ironize this heritage-cultural project. Higson defines heritage film as quality cinema for members of the domestic middle-class British audience that values an 'iconography' of the 'national past, its people, its landscape, and its cultural heritage.' Central to this cultural impulse, Higson states, is 'the adaptation of heritage properties, whether novels and plays, or buildings and values,' in order, in the 'national interest,' to culturally 'elevat[e] the general public.' …The James movies…portray the English country house as peopled primarily with upstarts, Americans, and expatriates. (Sadoff 2002: 42)

It is difficult to force James and Wharton adaptations to fit the mould of English heritage cinema, because they *are* stories 'people primarily by upstarts.' The films can be seen to dramatize contemporary fears about Americanization, sexuality and gender roles, as well as providing the 'critical view of the past' Villasur mentions by dramatising the restrictive social conventions of Victorian and Edwardian life. The television adaptation of *The Buccaneers* pushes the critical envelope even further by wading into contemporary British national politics as well. These are not films that

present a yearning for a simpler, better time: they represent the convergence of our past with our present.

Fidelity, Adaptation and the Boudieuian use of art and dress

Theorists who have directly tackled the theory of adaptation have hinted at Roland Barthes's idea of the third meaning, the idea that the cinematic image forms a "passage from language to significance", (Barthes 1977: 65) as Brian McFarlane does in his book *Novel to Film*:

> The insistence on fidelity…fails to take into serious account what may be transferred from novel to film as distinct from what will require more complex processes of adaptation; and it marginalizes those production determinants which have nothing to do with the novel but may be powerfully influential upon the film. (McFarlane 1996: 10)

What much adaptation criticism attempts to do is locate 'what may be transferred' and describe briefly how it has been transferred, all the while lamenting the film's 'omission' of scene X from chapter Y which is naturally, the key to the *entire* story. This is certainly the case with criticisms of the film of *The Portrait of a Lady*:

> James even went so far as to disclose what was 'obviously the best thing' about the book: namely Chapter 42, the quiet interlude in which Isabel Archer sits by her dying fire, far into the night, taking the dismal measure of her imprisoning marriage to Gilbert Osmond. …What more tantalizing incentive for cinematic translation could a feminist director want? Yet 'the best thing' about James's *Portrait* does not appear in Jane Campion's *Portrait,* an omission surely worthy of interrogation. …Campion's avoidance of this moment in her film should be viewed as an indirect acknowledgement of a strategic problem of screen adaptation. (Anesko 2000: 178)

The idea that the omission or inclusion of James's favoured scene can still be considered the basis for what constitutes a good adaptation is emblematic of the lingering influence of fidelity criticism. Anesko's use of the term 'cinematic translation' is key here, as it connotes a category of adaptation sometimes referred to as "*transposition,* 'in which a novel is given directly on the screen with a minimum of apparent interference." (McFarlane 1996: 10) Although Anesko praises Campion for

visualizing James's text in certain scenes, it is evident that translation or transposition of the novel is still seen as the ideal in adaptation criticism. If it can be considered somewhat passé to openly accuse a film, (or the director) of being unfaithful to the source novel, it would appear it is still possible to damn a film by accusing it of being unfaithful to the author's spirit. Many critics will deem an unconventional adaptation (such as Campion's *Portrait* or Softley's *Wings*) to be acceptable by conceding that it retains "the spirit" of James or Wharton. Sarah Cardwell in her book *Adaptation Revisited* reminds us: "Every adaptation is an authored, conscious response to or interpretation of a source text, one that may or may not be concerned with 'fidelity,' but is necessarily concerned with the creation of an independent film or television text." (Cardwell 2002: 21)

Although the film and the novel ought to be considered equally, the 'source text' often takes precedence even now in discussions of adaptation, a field dominated by film and television scholars rather than literary ones. Cardwell articulates the difficulty often encountered by theorists writing about adaptation: the problem of striking the right balance between text and film or television programme in terms of analysis and discussion. To write authoritatively about an adaptation, it would be ridiculous to be unfamiliar with the source text, and therefore it must be referred to. However, one does not wish to be accused of privileging the book over the adaptation, as this approach is (oddly enough) commonly used by film reviewers, tends to lack theoretical rigour, and encounters the problems mentioned by McFarlane and illuminated throughout this thesis, that of ignoring major, visually interpretive aspects of the adaptation. This is where Barthes's third meaning becomes important. The description and analysis of the visual use of dress and art in the six adaptations discussed here are a way of beginning to articulate the 'passage from language to significance.' It is here that the relationship is formed between James's and Wharton's words and the visual symbolism of the

adaptations. An exquisite example of this comes from Jane Campion's film of *The Portrait of a Lady*. James's description of the ornate gold and black interior of the Palazzo Roccanera is evoked by Isabel's dress. We see Isabel now married, bowed under a heavy, braided hairstyle. Her hair is glossier, heavier and darker than earlier in the film. She is dressed in almost unrelieved black. Her dress is black velvet, with a high tight collar, and even her gloves are black. Her earrings, a single line of gold embroidery and a looped gold braid on her dress denote an almost militaristic style. (Figure 47) In a few frames, these visual symbols have signaled that Osmond has imposed his taste completely on everything that surrounds him, including Isabel. The deep black dress and heavy hair let us see and feel the oppressiveness of Isabel's current life and surroundings. This sequence illustrates the symbolic possibilities of dress and objects within this cycle of adaptations.

The way art and dress are employed throughout these six adaptations have often given rise to accusations of conservative political agendas (see Higson 1993 and 1996), a museum aesthetic (see Higson 1996) and middlebrow taste (Anesko, Eaton, Sadoff 1998). The way dress, art, music and theatre are employed in the costume drama is frequently perceived (in a negative light) as postmodern pastiche. These accusations are also at the heart of literary critics' objections to these films and their representations of both the historical past and the literary legacies of Henry James and Edith Wharton. Because these are adaptations and because they ostensibly do not allow you to linger over these details of narrative, art, music and costume—as it is implied the novels do—these types of film and television adaptations are still largely seen as interfering with a 'pure' appreciation of painting, poetry, music, historical dress or the classic literary source text. However, as my analysis of Isabel's dramatic black dress as a visual interpretation of Jamsian description suggests, I propose to argue throughout the following chapters that within this cycle of six adaptations, the elements of dress and art

take on a plurality of visual meaning that constitutes a vital component of the adaptation process.

The period details so disdained by Higson: houses, dresses, art, jewels, do much more than reproduce a conservative vision of the past. They are the symbols that form the passage of meaning between the source text and the adaptation. They are the fabric that makes up adaptation's symbolic significance in this cycle. Adeline Tinter in her landmark essay, "The Museum world of Henry James" remarks on James's own attitude towards objects in his fiction:

> ...we must proceed from James's own assumption: objects give out a meaning proper to themselves. Tracing this meaning from beginning to end, accepting its variations as they appear in the context of the stories, we conclude that, although at one time it may be strategy for visualizing and, at another, substance for myth, the overall meaning is that the work of art embodies and incorporates civilization as it was available to James. It acts as a protagonist in the total drama. For James's *oeuvre* is the record of an attempt to balance the material aspect of civilization, art—with its spiritual aspect, life. (Tintner 1963: 140)

Tintner's phrase that art 'acts as a protagonist in the total drama' perfectly reflects the use of art demonstrated by these adaptations. Nowhere is this more clear than in *The Golden Bowl*, where the bowl itself is a harbinger of discord and a source of revelation. The television adaptation of *The Buccaneers* uses three paintings by Correggio to illustrate the maturation of the heroine Nan. The Correggio paintings and the way they reflect Nan's internal hopes and fears, particularly at times when she fails to express her feelings verbally, act as the bridge between the novel and visual significance. When Nan describes the events depicted in Correggio's *Leda and the Swan* to her future lover Guy Thwarte, we know this is a symbolic reflection of her shattered innocence, her struggle to conform to her new role, her husband's emotional distance, and her yearning for that glimpse of true companionship with Guy. By allowing the camera to linger in close-up over the painting, with Nan's emotional description overlaid, the Correggios take on additional layers of meaning, extending far beyond a mere demonstration of the

Trevennick family wealth and taste. Wharton's magnificent phrase from *The Age of Innocence* serves as an indication of the symbolic importance of objects that permeates both her work and this cycle of adaptations: "...they all lived in a kind of hieroglyphic world, where the real thing was never said or done or even thought, but only represented by a set of arbitrary signs." (Wharton 1986: 44 and film)

Wharton's idea of the hieroglyphic world predates the theories of Pierre Bourdieu, but is in fact contemporaneous with those of Ferdinand de Saussure, who asserts: "the link between signal and signification is arbitrary." (1983: 67) Interestingly, Wharton had been living in Paris for over five years when de Saussure died in 1913, and the first edition of his *Cours de linguistique générale* appeared in 1916. *The Age of Innocence* was published in 1920. Although we cannot know if Wharton was familiar with de Saussure's theories, she was certainly widely read and by her own admission in *A Backward Glance,* "my new friends [in Paris] came from worlds as widely different as the University, the literary and Academic *milieux*, and the old and aloof society of the Faubourg Saint-Germain." (Wharton 1987: 258) Her phrase 'the hieroglyphic world' evokes Saussure's notions of the signal and signification, as well as Bourdieu's theory of symbolic goods. It seems remarkable that although *The Age of Innocence* is well known as both a novel and a film, no one has ever before noted this remarkable phrase's connection with these particular theories. In a single sentence, Wharton manages to communicate the idea that all these layers of intimate description we read in the novels and see in the adaptations—details such as Newland's preference for Eastlake furniture in his study, the film's close-ups on flowers and plates of food—are not mere display. What she is saying is that these objects were never just about demonstrating wealth or fashion, they were the signs that stood for the unsaid. In the words of de Saussure:

> Any means of expression accepted in a society rests in principle upon a collective habit, or on convention, which comes to the same thing. Signs of politeness, for instance, although often endowed with a certain natural

> expressiveness (prostrating oneself nine times on the ground is the way to greet an emperor in China) are nonetheless fixed by rule. It is this rule that renders them obligatory, not their intrinsic value. We may therefore say that signs which are entirely arbitrary convey better than others the semiological process. (1983: 68)

This is why an object Wharton lingers over, such as Ellen's fur-trimmed (or in the film's case, feather-trimmed) dress, conjures up such a wealth of meaning for Archer. It is not just a warm, attractive gown. It hints at Ellen's Europeaness, at fin-de-siecle decadence, at eroticism, at a world of bohemian artistry. By wearing a style that contradicts New York custom, Ellen indicates that she is both innocent and uncaring, but New York judges her meaning—her signification—severely. Her dress is an extension of herself and a provocation to society. The fur-trimmed dress typifies the type of 'arbitrary sign' described by both Wharton and de Saussure:

> The word *arbitrary* also calls for comment. It must not be taken to imply that a signal depends on the free choice of the speaker. (We shall see later that the individual has no power to alter a sign in any respect once it has becomes established in a linguistic community.) The term implies simply that the signal is *unmotivated*: that is to say arbitrary in relation to its signification, with which it has no natural connexion in reality. (de Saussure 1983: 69)

Therefore, the signification of Ellen's dresses may be arbitrary, but as the narrative demonstrates, she is powerless to change their meaning once they have been viewed by society.

Stella Bruzzi, in her chapter on the costume film in *Undressing Cinema*, also mentions Wharton's phrase 'the hieroglyphic world', but in the context of her analysis of the film of *The Age of Innocence* as fetishistic; she also maintains that "the potency of the [film's] metaphoric language is that the spectator is both aware that such actions and objects possess a significance beyond themselves and their immediate function, but ultimately excluded from their exact, codified meaning." (1997: 50) This may be true, but her statement also implies that films like *The Age of Innocence* will always remain indecipherable, except to the connoisseur or expert, and perhaps this accounts for their

limited appeal at the box office. However, while it would be ridiculous to imagine the casual viewer taking in every possible nuance of a film's meaning, surely they cannot be excluded from detecting any symbolic significance. Bruzzi's comment about viewers being excluded brings to mind Marc Bousquet's comment in his chapter in *Henry James goes to the Movies*:

> Readers may vary in worthiness but James's merit remains the same or even enlarges over time. The sense that any failure of the circuit between Jamesian prose and the reader seems inevitably to lie in the reader is a sense created by the logic of cultural capital that presents itself as accumulating inevitably, even naturally, in the hands of the most worthy. (2002: 211)

While Bruzzi is pointing out what she feels to be the opaqueness of *The Age of Innocence*'s symbolic economy for the modern viewer, with its fetishization of the past through elements of costume, Bousquet reminds us that James continues to be viewed in the same way. While James's textual density is continuously held up as a virtue, screen adaptations of his work are rarely regarded in the same way, and this is frequently used as a prop to those who wish James to remain the exclusive property of the intellectual elite. Although Wharton never wrote in a similarly obscure style, there is certainly a feeling amongst the few Wharton scholars who have written about the screen adaptations that they are an injustice to her work. (see Costanzo Cahir and Hersey 1999) Few have been able to take A. Robert Lee's suggestion that "in any great adaptation, we experience doubly: a text relived in film, a film become its own 'text'." (1996: 177)

In the words of Bourdieu, Wharton's and James's novels and their film adaptations describe "a habitus of the aesthetics of the ruling classes" (1993: 236). Bourdieu's notions of the field of power, and the hierarchy of cultural objects are particularly useful when looking at the use of paintings and art objects in the costume film, but can also be applied to the cultural and narrative symbolism of dress. Bourdieu stresses the importance of examining "the internal logic of cultural objects, their

structure as *languages*" (Bourdieu 1993: 181) and that is what I have set out to do in my research, to attempt to articulate the way art objects and dress constitute a language of adaptation that works alongside dialogue, performance and setting in this cycle of screen adapatations. Adeline Tintner's comments on James's literary use of art objects parallels Bourdieu, forming a literary basis for the cinematic use of 'symbolic goods' such as the golden bowl. Carol J. Singley, in her article "Bourdieu, Wharton and the changing culture in *The Age of Innocence*" takes up the idea of how Wharton's novels demonstrate some of Bourdieu's other theories, but without noting the key phrase 'the hieroglyphic world' or mentioning his particular idea of symbolic goods. Wharton's notion of society as a hieroglyphic world perfectly reflects Bourdieu's theory of symbolic goods: "...symbolic goods are a two faced-reality, a commodity and a symbolic object. Their specifically cultural value and their commercial value remain relatively independent, although the economic sanction may come to reinforce their cultural consecration." (1993: 113) The objects that make up the hieroglyphic world in both the novels and the films—art, dress, property—as well as less tangible influences such as decorum and social mobility—function as symbolic goods. These are objects and spheres of influence that are directly affected by material wealth and social credibility. An object's 'cultural consecration' can be secured through a display of wealth and style. For example, a painting by a celebrated artist is expensive, but also sought after because of its 'style', whether it be artistic technique or subject matter. A person's cultural consecration within the hieroglyphic world of society can also be secured in the same way, and just as art can fall out of favour, so too can the individual. Within the adaptations, art and fashion function as symbolic goods in the same way as they do in the novels, but their visual representation and reproduction also engages the viewer in the act of what Bourdieu calls art perception.

> An act of deciphering, *unrecognized as such*, immediate and adequate 'comprehension', is possible and effective only in the special case in

> which the cultural code which makes the act of deciphering possible is immediately and completely mastered by the observer (in the form of cultivated ability or inclination) and merges with the cultural code which has rendered the work perceived possible (Bourdieu 1993: 215)

Pamela Church Gibson is one of a handful of theorists who have reflected on the use of art in recent costume drama: "Heritage films made during the 90s became increasingly 'painterly'. This is particularly noticeable in the use of tableaux—reminiscent of the way in which Peter Greenaway has used the work of different artists." (Church Gibson 2000: 117) John Orr provides an informative description of Greenaway's painterly aesthetic in *The Cook, the Thief, his Wife and her Lover*:

> In the dining room of *The Cook*, Franz Hals' portrait of the Haarlem officers, who stare down from the back wall, mocks the latter-day chevaliers of Albert Spica who sit parodically framed under their portrait doubles in similar sashes, similar saturations of red and black. This self-conscious framing creates multi-layered images whose richness is enhanced by widescreen, by saturated colours and by depth of field. (Orr 2000: 333)

This painterly aesthetic, as well the notion of the hieroglyphic world, is intimately connected to the use of dress in the six films. The works of John Singer Sargent and James Tissot help to create this hieroglyphic atmosphere, whether their paintings appear directly in the film (as with *The Age of Innocence*) or whether they inform the costume and production design (as with *The House of Mirth*, *The Buccaneers*, and *The Wings of the Dove*). This use of dress to reflect a character's unspoken social actions and emotions can be seen in the adaptations' display of heroines in red dresses, usually worn at moments of social unconventionality that precede a violation of decorum. In *The Age of Innocence,* Ellen wears a red dress to the Van der Luyden dinner, (Figure 3) where she commits the memorable infraction of "walk[ing] away from one gentleman to seek the company of another" (Wharton 1986: 63 and film) and where she also invites Newland to visit her alone at home. Ellen's second red dress is the velvet lounge dress Newland is so enamoured of in the novel, a dress he recalls seeing in a Parisian portrait by Sargent's teacher, Carolus Duran. (Wharton 104) Ellen wears this dress to receive

the socially dangerous Julius Beaufort, and then discuss her plans for divorce with Newland. In the film of *The House of Mirth* Lily appears at the opera in a vivid scarlet dress, (Figure 77) accompanied by the unmarried Rosedale and known philanderer Gus Trenor. Lily's dress evokes both Sargent's *Ena and Betty, daughters of Asher and Mrs. Wertheimer* (Figure 86) and *Madame X* (Figure 87). In this same dress, Lily leaves the opera with Gus, in full view of society. When they arrive at his house, she finds he has tricked her into being alone with him, leaving her irremediably compromised. Charlotte in *The Golden Bowl* wears a scarlet gown during her weekend at Matcham (Figure 95)—the height of her social success—as she discusses her plans for an assignation with Amerigo. In *The Wings of the Dove,* Kate wears a red velvet gown (in stark contrast to her blue and black costume palette) during a sequence where she is alone in London, and growing jealous of Merton's attraction to Milly in Venice. Kate's jealousy prompts her to reveal her plan to Lord Mark in the following scene, foiling her own plot. In *The Buccaneers,* Nan wears a red dress for a large Christmas party at Longlands. During a boisterous conga line that winds through the house, Nan finds herself alone among the Correggios with her future lover Guy Thwarte, a mistake for which she is later reprimanded by her formidable mother-in-law. In *The Portrait of a Lady* Isabel is wearing a red dress in the sequence where the Countess Gemini reveals Osmond and Mme. Merle's past affair to her. This knowledge gives her the strength to defy Osmond and travel to Ralph's bedside. The red dresses are used as visual signifiers to brand these characters in the eyes of society as unconventional. The red dresses imply a range of meanings, running the gamut from socially confident and sexually alluring to an indication of pain and torment.

> Stella Bruzzi comments on the use of haute couture in cinema:
>
> Iconic clothes serve a proclamatory function in film, they collide with the sequences in which they are placed because they carry an alternative, independent meaning that is not necessarily subservient to or even

> compatible with that of the dominant narrative. …The essence of iconic clothes is that they have an independent, prior meaning; they function as interjections or disruptions of the normative reality of the text. (1997: 17-18)

Although there are examples of haute couture in these six films, they are largely obscure except to the fashion aficionado[5]. Bruzzi's theory reflects the status of the red dresses in the six films. These are dresses that 'interject' a symbolic connotation of unconventionality and frequently, sexual availability, whether intended or not. Take Charlotte's red dress at Matcham, a dress in which she oozes social confidence and the awareness that she is being admired. (Figure 95) Charlotte is at the apex of her social influence, confident enough to begin plotting her afternoon rendez-vous with Amerigo. Contrast this with Lily's red dress, a dress in which she also appears utterly confident and comfortable with admiration. However, it is this dress, in tandem with her appearance with Gus and Rosedale, that inadvertently signal a sexual availability of which Lily is totally unaware. She is utterly shocked when Gus tries to extort sexual favours from her. Charlotte presents the image of a woman who knows exactly what her clothes can say about her; while Lily knows she is lovely, she has no idea of the deeper meanings her clothes may conjur up. Just as iconic ways of dressing can signify different layers of meaning in these films, the 'iconic' art images of Sargent, Tissot, Corregio, and Klimt also inform the mise-en-scene of these six films. Some of the paintings I have discussed specifically in my analysis can be seen to have directly influenced actual costumes in the films. When paintings appear in the context of the adapted narrative, they also express a plurality of meaning, like clothes they have 'an independent prior meaning.' When we see Bouguereau's *The Return of Spring* in *The Age of Innocence*, it not only signifies 'neoclassical European art', but also Beaufort's

[5] The Age of Innocence uses articles from the house of Fendi at a time when the brand was not especially popular. It would be another ten years before Fendi re-established itself as a global accessories brand. The Wings of the Dove uses vintage pleated silk dresses by Fortuny, a particular example being Milly's white dress. The house of Fortuny no longer exists, but their dresses are a kind of badge of 'ultimate vintage' as the dresses can still be worn.

wealth, taste, and ability to travel. More importantly, it signals Beaufort as the social trendsetter he is, by daring to hang a nude painting, as the voiceover puts it, "in plain sight." *The Return of Spring* functions as part of the symbolic economy of the culture portrayed in *The Age of Innocence*. The transfer of the symbolic economy of the novel to that of the film is accomplished largely through voice-over, and close-up shots. By allowing the camera to close in and even linger on certain paintings, backdrops and elements of dress, we are being invited to engage in Bourdieu's method of "art perception…a conscious or unconscious deciphering operation," (1993: 215) which in the case of *Age* is assisted by the voice-over. In *The Buccaneers,* Nan's narration of *Leda and the Swan* invites us not into Correggio as "the 'fetish of the name of the master'" (Bourdieu 1993: 258) but into her particular, personal appreciation of the image. In *Wings,* we are not told anything about the Klimt exhibit by either the characters or a voice-over, we are simply invited to contemplate the erotic power of *Danae* alongside Milly, Merton and Kate.

The artwork, like the dinners, parties, dresses, and traveling expeditions all form a network of objects, objects that we are invited to decipher in a variety of ways, on any number of levels. The signification of wealth through this symbolic, visual system of objects is just one aspect of meaning in this cycle of films. We can link Wharton and James's attitude towards art, dress, and interiors, an attitude that the films embrace and expand upon, to Bourdieu's notion of symbolic goods. These are hieroglyphic objects we are asked to decipher in both a cultural and economic context. In the television adaptation of *The Buccaneers* Colonel St. George presents his wife with a large, jeweled necklace after a lucky turn on Wall Street.[6] Mrs. St. George later gives these same jewels to her eldest daughter Virginia on her wedding day, as she is about to become

[6] . The book specifies a diamond necklace, while the television adaptation chooses a sapphire and diamond necklace with matching earrings, a choice which complements the blonde Mrs. St George and later, Virginia.

Lady Seadown. When the Colonel's fortunes collapse, Virginia pawns her jewels. When her father is once more able to give her an allowance, Virginia regains these jewels and passes them off as a present from her unfaithful husband as she humiliates her rival, Seadown's former mistress. The necklace and earrings are initially the symbol of the St. George's nouveau riche fortunes, but they later serve as the kind of object readily converted back into liquid capital. To Virginia, these jewels are her emergency fund when she pawns them, and the symbol of her obsession with social position when she regains them, using them against a woman who no longer poses any kind of threat to her. Like her jewels, Virginia's golden beauty conceals an avaricious nature. Art and dress in this cycle of adaptations presents an explosion of visual, symbolic meaning, but these objects also signify the immense wealth of the physical world the characters inhabit. Their good taste at admiring established European artists, the women's Paris dresses, the exquisite preparation of meals all represent the restrained enjoyment that connotes an elegant life, and the system of objects that indicate upper class habitus of the period. Those who are enthusiastic and excitable, or who deign to develop their own set of tastes, are social deviants in this world. Bourdieu's notion of symbolic goods is perhaps part of the reason Higson initially takes issue with the involvement of the heritage industry in films about the British past. To Higson, all these objects symbolize a static version of the past that recounts only the history of the wealthy and the privileged—to him it is closed system of symbolic objects, it can *only* indicate habitus. But, if we consider these objects as a 'language' as Bourdieu suggests, these objects and the films they inhabit take on the more contemporary notion of the past as a series of inheritances derived from multiple sources (Goode 2003). As Higson asks (but fails to satisfactorily address) in a later article, "Whose heritage are we talking about?" (2000: 36)

Mark Eaton in his chapter "Exquisite Taste: the recent Henry James films as middle-brow culture" also addresses the place of contemporary social comment in Campion's adaptation of *The Portrait of a Lady*:

> Campion did plumb James's *The Portrait of a Lady* for themes that echoed those in her earlier films. She made the book her own, Critics have called the film an 'appropriation', or even a 'postmodern appropriation, a pastiche of adaptation and invention, a work that takes James's novel as a pretext for intervention, rather than a text to be translated directly to the screen.'...Campion wants viewers to contemplate the differences between James's era and ours by at once respecting the alterity of the past and recognizing the continuities it has with the present. (2000: 62)

James's novel still fascinates, encompassing themes that link it to our present world, where a filmmaker with a strong vision can see adapting it as both a visual and, if you will, a philosophical challenge. This proves that James and Wharton are writers whose stories remain emblematic of a certain pre-millenial social malaise . On the cusp of a new century, it seems that in the United Kingdom and in North America we chose to reach back to our past, to the last turn of the century, in our films. James and Wharton wrote about the beginnings of an—albeit privileged—but nonetheless social and global mobility. Many of their characters come from the 'new world' to encounter the past through art, architecture, and travel to the 'old world.' We are constantly being asked which continent is the more liberal, which the more conservative. American girls like Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady*, Milly Theale in *The Wings of the Dove*, Maggie Verver in *The Golden Bowl*, the four protagonists of *The Buccaneers* and even May Welland in *The Age of Innocence* are fond of their own way, as we suppose heiresses often are, and are brought up short by the insularity of the European society they encounter. When Isabel, Milly and Kate venture through Italy, they experience Europe as a place of greater freedom, though that freedom proves largely illusory. All the characters in these six novels and films are adrift in a world where the rules are changing. Things that once seemed set in stone—the position of women, sexual mores,

class status, the necessity of marriage—are now in a state of flux. James's collectors, Gilbert Osmond and Adam Verver, attempt to reach back to the past through their collections, to a time when the masculine role was more enshrined, and they try to impose this same attitude on their wives. In *The House of Mirth* Lily Bart represents the *dernier cri* of a social system in which a single woman is deprived of choice. Wharton's later heroines like Lizzy, Annabelle, and Conchita in *The Buccaneers* are allowed more freedom. Even *The Age of Innocence*'s Ellen Olenska , though deprived of the man she loves, receives a better fate than *The House of Mirth's* Lily Bart or Kate Croy in *The Wings of the Dove*, as Ellen is the only woman who achieves anything resembling lasting independence.

Under the cloak of the past we see ourselves: the film adaptation of James' *The Golden Bowl* makes reference to this idea in the oriental ballet sequence when a character comments "it's just like in Hamlet" alluding to the ballet as a possible revelation of the illicit affairs punctuating their social circle. Through the past, (and in the case of *The Golden Bowl*'s oriental ballet, the Other) the present is exposed. In these six films, through dress and art as symbolic objects, we see layers of meaning in a film image that prove as rich and elegant as anything James or Wharton ever wrote. By engaging with and identitfying these symbolic objects in this cycle of films, we will begin to see the emergence of a language of images that constitutes an under analysed component of adaptating classic novels to the screen.

Chapter 2: The Age of Innocence[7]

In the introduction to *Screen's* 2002 special issue on adaptation and the literary film, the editors make the compelling argument that "...the structures and language of literature and film need not be considered a one-way traffic." (2002: 2) Martin Scorsese's 1993 film of *The Age of Innocence* is cited as a prime example of this idea, where textual imagery motivates "processes of metaphor and condensation" (2002: 2) within the film. This process of textual condensation and visual elaboration is demonstrated through the film's use of dress and art images, such as Bouguereau's *The Return of Spring*, and several images by James Tissot, particularly *l'Ambitieuse*. Through these symbolic objects the four themes: wealth, desire, decorum and social mobility associated with this cycle of literary film and television adaptations are elaborated. Briefly, *The Age of Innocence* takes place in late 1870s New York City and tells the story of society lawyer Newland Archer's marriage to the lovely and seemingly innocent May Welland. On the night they announce their engagement, May's scandalous cousin Countess Ellen Olenska returns to New York. Ellen wishes to get a divorce from her European husband, but is cautioned against it by her family and by Newland. Although Ellen and Newland are deeply attracted to one another, social and familial restraints prevent them from consummating an affair. Unbeknownst to Newland, May and their entire social set have long suspected an affair, and May quietly orchestrates the social exile of Ellen to Paris. Ellen is made financially independent by her grandmother Mrs. Manson Mingott and leaves New York forever. Many years later, Newland visits Paris with his adult son, but refuses to visit Ellen, preferring to remain in the courtyard of her apartment with his memories.

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[7] Elements of an earlier version of this chapter appeared in a conference paper I gave in July 2003 entitled 'The Age of Sex: the narrative function of accessories in Sex and the City and Edith Wharton's The Age of Innocence.' This paper subsequently appeared in October 2004 in Flash magazine, published in conjunction with the Flash fashion and art event held in Dubai. A copy of this paper is enclosed with the thesis.

Wealth, the hieroglyphic world and the symbolic object in *The Age of Innocence*

The role of wealth is a discernable undercurrent in almost all of Edith Wharton's work, especially when she dissects the world of her youth in *The Age of Innocence*. Unlike *The House of Mirth* and *The Buccaneers*, the monetary theme does not revolve around fortune hunting, but around settlements, and financial independence. In the case of *The Age of Innocence*, both film and novel present a delicious physical world, where money is most frequently represented by fashion and interior decoration. In "Bourdieu, Wharton and Changing Culture in *The Age of Innocence*" Carol J. Singley remarks "*The Age of Innocence* exhibits Wharton's dynamic perspectives about the shaping forces of culture." (2003: 497) This is evoked most strongly in the iconic phrase Wharton uses to describe society in *Age*: "they all lived in a kind of hieroglyphic world where the real thing was never said or done or even thought, but only represented by a set of arbitrary signs." (Wharton 1986: 44) This phrase can be seen as a kind of predecessor to a great deal of cultural analysis, particularly the theories of Pierre Bourdieu and Ferdinand de Saussure. The idea of the 'hieroglyphic world' evokes both de Saussure's theory of the sign, as well as Bourdieu's theory of symbolic goods. Singley confirms this link:

> Bourdieu notes that symbolic systems of discourse are instruments of knowledge *and* domination. They make consensus possible by appearing self-evident and definitive, enabling verbal dismissals to be experienced as physical attacks. …Thus even descriptive comments about Ellen [Olenska] have the power to condemn. (2003: 503)

Through Wharton's description of a character's clothes, and surroundings, we come to know both how they perceive their own social position and how they are perceived by others. The film places emphasis on this distinction by including a voiceover with many sequences. We may be confronted with the image of a character who is confident, when secretly they are being judged harshly by their peers. The film's dinner sequences, for example, which might otherwise be considered mere display, are informed by the voiceover, drawing the audience to the significance of each plate and course. There are

two significant dinners that bracket the story: the Van der Luyden dinner for the Duke of St. Austrey where Ellen arrives late wearing the red dress, and May and Newland's farewell dinner for Ellen where Newland realises society believes he and Ellen are lovers. At each of these dinners, the place settings and food are shown in an overhead shot that pans the length of the table, taking in menu cards, flower arrangements, flatware and special centre pieces. At the Van der Luyden dinner, the voiceover narrates the significance of the china on display and how each set originates from a different branch of the extended Van der Luyden family. The ancestral china in this case acts as a visual demonstration of the Van der Luyden's history of social influence in New York. Rather than being surrounded by an army of relatives, their status as social heavyweights is instead represented by displayed heirlooms that act as a manifestation of social power to those present at the dinner. At the farewell dinner, May issues commemorative gilt-edged menus, hires extra servants and orders a roman punch. Such a sumptuous send off would hardly be appropriate for someone who might eventually return to society, so there can be no doubt that Ellen is expected to remain in Europe. Her exile is further confirmed when the Van der Luydens themselves take Ellen home, precluding any final exchange between her and Newland.

In her article "Classic Adaptations, modern reinventions," Belén Vidal Villasur introduces the idea of form "…in a sense shared by Wharton's novel and Scorsese's film, not only in terms of the display of objects in the period film, but also their ability to function as signs." (2002: 10) Literary critic Pamela Knights in *The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton* agrees:

> …the text makes it hard to sustain readings that dismiss cultural furnishings as 'background' (whether picturesque or oppressive) or that see characters as discreet beings, with an independent 'selfhood' separate and intact from any social inscriptions. (1995: 20)

Villasur expands on this idea as it functions in the film:

> *The Age of Innocence* accurately performs the novel's dissection of the power of social appearances but, unlike other mainstream period films, the frame does not present us with an immediately recognizable world. This is a film *driven by form,* but which does not naturalize form in order to make it an invisible component of the everyday. Instead, the frame underscores the strangeness of that culture, and its lack of readability for the contemporary viewer. (Villasur 2002:10)

If the filmic world of *The Age of Innocence* is at first unrecognizable, it may be because it is not only "hieroglyphic" (Wharton 1986: 44) in terms of objects and customs, but built on a degree of wealth and privilege that is truly unimaginable to most contemporary viewers. We are inebriated with space, rich colour, and sumptuous texture, and this is most evident in the Steadicam shot that opens the scene of the Beaufort's opera ball. While it is clear this shot represents a ball guest's point of view—it follows Newland Archer, (played by Daniel Day-Lewis) into the Beaufort mansion—it also reinforces the sense of a privileged, moneyed world because it acts as "...the gaze that knows its way because it *makes* its way." (Villasur 2002: 10)

Taking Villasur's definition of form, the task of deciphering becomes much easier. Wharton's articulation of the society of *The Age of Innocence* as a 'hieroglyphic world' underscores the importance of social knowledge in this particular story, and the film reproduces this key statement in voiceover, calling attention to the fact that this is a filmic world whose attention to detail is lost without its voiceover narration. Even Wharton's contemporary reviewers were divided on the issue of social knowledge of the 1870s when the book first appeared in 1920. A review of the novel in *The Times Literary Supplement* states "As to her picture of the times, how is any of us over here to criticize it, beyond saying that it is full of vivacity and of character and of colour, and that there is not a point which *seems* to be false?" (as qtd. in Tuttleton 1992: 290) Her American reviewers were not always so trusting though, as this one from the *Pacific Review* demonstrates:

> …It was inevitable, to fall back upon an illustration, that her dilettante hero should have gone in for Eastlake furniture, as Mrs. Wharton assures us that he did. But the easy way in which she assumes that the reader will understand her casual reference to Sir Charles's endeavour to revive a "sincere" furniture, puts one to scrambling to recall that Eastlakeism was the polite counterpart , in the seventies, of the robust rebellions of William Morris against a dowdy Victorianism. (as qtd. in Tuttleton 1992: 295)

Though a film audience in 1993 is seen to need an explanation of the social knowledge of the 1870s via voiceover, even Wharton's contemporaries seemed to be in disagreement as to whether her hieroglyphic world needed deciphering. The question of decipherment can be compared to the way that classic novels—particularly Henry James's novels—are always annotated now, with everything from translations of foreign phrases to the explanation of events and cultural practices that are now obscure.

Though money is apparent everywhere in both novel and film of *The Age of Innocence*, the thing itself is never seen, only the things it can buy: Crown Derby china, elaborate dinners, flowers in winter, dresses from Worth, shipments of the latest books from Europe, travel, art, and of course, property. The category of property encompasses not only mansions and summer homes, but also, as we will see, women. Robert K. Martin confirms this about the work of both Wharton and James in his article "Ages of Innocence", "[q]uestions of alliance and marriage are thus inscribed in a world of property…". (2000: 8) Scorsese's film takes special care in representing these objects, especially the dinner scenes, where food and china are presented to the camera in the most perfect rapport, as if the viewer were also a guest at the table. In order to create this world of objects, the film's credits list such arcane staff as: Etiquette consultant, Chef for 19th century meals, and Table Decoration consultant. The film also employs the companies that continue to produce luxury goods: all the furs are from the Italian fashion house Fendi, the stationary is from renown jeweller Tiffany&Co., crystal from Baccarat, and select art from Christie's. Apart from representing the huge sums of

money circulating through old New York society, these objects also have meanings with regard to taste, tradition and feeling.

Take the example of Julius and Regina Beaufort's rise and fall. Their opulent opera ball occurs at the beginning of both film and novel, but the social meaning of this opulence must be deciphered by the narrator, a device the film employs via a voiceover performed by Joanne Woodward. As Newland Archer strolls through the Beaufort mansion, which has been "boldly planned" (Wharton 1986: 21) the aforementioned Steadicam shot takes in not only "the vista of enfiladed drawing rooms, [but also]…the much discussed nude by Bouguereau." (Wharton 1986: 21-22) In the novel, Wharton identifies this Bouguereau nude as *Love Victorious,* a rather tame depiction of a naked cherub. The film replaces this painting with the considerably racier image, also by Bougeureau, *The Return of Spring,* (Figure 11) which shows a nude young woman, her arms crossed ecstatically across her breasts, as small cherubs surround her face. The Steadicam shot also takes in repeated images of Tissot's *l'Ambitieuse* (Figure 12), *Too Early* and *Hush (the Concert).* The title *l'Ambitieuse,* is often translated as *Political Woman* for the English title. This is a well-known and frequently reproduced image of a young woman entering a crowded room on the arm of an older escort. The man's face is turned away from the viewer, allowing all our attention to focus on the young woman. She has golden brown hair piled high on her head and she wears an elaborately frilled pink dress. Her waist is cinched with a large black corset and she carries a large fan of pink ostrich feathers. Her facial expression is evocative of a youthful innocence, but also conveys that awareness and acceptance of admiration displayed by other society beauties such as *The House of Mirth's* Lily Bart and *The Golden Bowl's* Charlotte Stant. In the film, this image appears once in close-up (Figure 2), and twice in the background of the Beaufort's 'enfiladed drawing rooms.' Superficially, this image appropriately conveys the correct style of the era, as well as demonstrating the Beaufort wealth

through an object of taste. However, the painting's title and the closer inspection of the image reveals it to be something of a satire, just as Wharton's novel is critical of the world she portrays. Tissot's painting reveals a crowd of caricatures:

> In the background are a collection of individuals found in this sort of political gathering, including Turkish men in fezzes and other somewhat crude ethnic stereotypes such as the man with the hooked nose. An elderly lady with a formidable—and exposed—bosom represents a familiar figure of fun, the 'mutton dressed as lamb.' " (Marshall 1999: 150)

In addition to these images, the expression of the central figure, the woman in pink alludes to both May Welland's mask of innocence and the more overt social scheming of almost every other female character in the novel and the adaptation.

Wharton also mentions a glimpse of a conservatory, "where camellias and tree ferns arched their costly foliage," (Wharton 1986: 21) and Scorsese makes this the setting for Newland and May's tête-à-tête, where she assures him their engagement has been announced. The presence of a ballroom, and the rooms planned around it, indicates that the Beaufort's house is relatively new for the time period. Alongside the newness of the dwelling, is the indication that Julius Beaufort, despite his marriage into "one of America's most honoured families" (Wharton 1986: 19 and film) via his wife Regina, and his "important position in the world of affairs" is still considered an outsider due to his "dissipated habits, …bitter tongue, and mysterious antecedents." (film) However, society also freely acknowledges his style, "Mr. Beaufort's secret, people were agreed, was the way he carried things off." (Wharton 1986: 20 and film)

Beaufort's social position remains prestigious, until he loses money on the stock market (Wharton 1986: 262). Once his fortune is wiped out, society allows Beaufort to disappear. Near the end of the novel, we discover that Beaufort manages to recover his social position after Regina's death. He marries his longtime mistress Annie Ring, and dies a prosperous expatriate in Buenos Aires. His daughter is respectably engaged to

Newland's son. (Wharton 1986: 352) Though a minor character, Julius illustrates how precarious social position can be, and how it can depend largely on the objects and customs that demonstrate material wealth.

Both the novel and the adaptation deploy Beaufort as a male example of the precarious position occupied by the *nouveau riche* in New York society at this period, but the fate of women was even more dangerous. Unlike men such as Beaufort, a woman's social position was determined entirely by her family or marital connections. A woman could easily inherit money, or as in *The Buccaneers*, her family could become wealthy through business success, but a fortune was still not a guaranteed *entrée* into society. Unless born into a respected family, the only way a woman could buy her way into society was to marry into it. Once on the inside, the real performance began: clothes, speech, manners, and deportment all counted towards a woman's next social engagement. Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth* describes her social life as "part of the business, " (Wharton 1994: 14 and film) the business of being an unmarried, but still socially acceptable woman. It is interesting to note that few of Wharton's female characters are distinguished for their intelligence or innate goodness, as these were not qualities valued by old New York society. A woman could be beautiful, amusing, even a good conversationalist, but her primary assets were still her eligibility, her fertility, and her reputation.

The character with the most precarious position in *The Age of Innocence*, both socially and financially, is Countess Ellen Olenska, the woman Amy Taubin describes in her chapter "Dread and Desire" as "...the exotic interloper, the Europeanised bohemian, the only successfully independent female character Wharton created." (2001: 64) Ellen is first glimpsed at the opera, dressed in a fashion unusual enough to attract even more attention than her reappearance in New York after many years in Europe.

> …a slim young woman, a little less tall than May Welland, with brown hair growing in close curls about her temples and held in place by a narrow band of diamonds. The suggestion of this headdress, which gave her what was then called a "Josephine look," was carried out in the cut of the dark blue velvet gown rather theatrically caught up under her bosom by a girdle with a large old-fashioned clasp. The wearer of this unusual dress…seemed quite unconscious of the attention it was attracting… (Wharton 1986: 9)

Ellen appears dressed in a visibly European manner, suggesting the dress of French royalty and "…revealing, as she leaned forward, a little more shoulder and bosom than New York was accustomed to seeing, at least in ladies who wished to pass unnoticed." (Wharton 1986: 14) In her essay "Erotic Visual Tropes in the Fiction of Edith Wharton" Maureen Honey tells us that Ellen's "…Josephine-style dress resembles the daringly low-necked gowns worn by models for painters of women in theatre loges during the 1870s and 1880s." (1999: 93) The adaptation suggests that Ellen absents herself from the ball because, as May tells Newland in the conservatory, "she thought her dress wasn't smart enough." Ellen's dress is certainly not new, but nor is it in line with conservative New York fashions, and the drama of her ensemble, "…the way her dress (which had no tucker) sloped away from her thin shoulders shocked and troubled [Newland]" (Wharton 1986: 15), combined with the rumours circulating about her dubious marital status, present Ellen Olenska as socially and sexually threatening, "[Newland] hated to think of May Welland being exposed to a young woman so careless of the dictates of Taste." (Wharton 1986:15)

Ellen soon garners the attention of Julius Beaufort, further imperiling her social and fiscal status. Ellen, for whom New York remains largely hieroglyphic after so many years in Europe, accepts Julius' invitations to unconventional Sunday supper parties, with champagne, musicians and actors. Julius also takes a great deal of trouble to find Ellen a house in a 'fashionable' district, as the one she has chosen for herself is in, as she calls it, "*des quartiers excentriques*." (Wharton 1986: 73) From the beginning,

Ellen's relations say her appearances with Beaufort are dangerous, but hesitate to warn her. Later, when Beaufort is financially ruined, society assumes that Ellen's means will also be reduced, as she has been assumed to be having an affair with Beaufort.

Throughout her time in New York, Ellen is supported, both emotionally and financially by her grandmother Mrs. Manson Mingott, an eccentric and immensely wealthy dowager. The adaptation presents her, and her rich, unusual house, as a counterpoint to the rest of her relations. Not only is Mrs. Manson Mingott's house "in an inaccessible wilderness near the Central Park," as the film's narrator tells us, but she also lives on the ground floor of her house, a scandalous custom likened to "scenes in French fiction," (Wharton 1986: 28 and film) due to the proximity of public drawing rooms and private bedrooms. Granny Mingott exclaims throughout the story how her relations are unwilling to strike out on their own, and "there's not one of my children that takes after me but my little Ellen." (Wharton 1986: 152 and film) Another intriguing aspect to Ellen's grandmother is that she is so overweight she cannot get up and down stairs, which is initially the reason she chooses to live on the ground floor. She is in fact so obese that she no longer leaves the house. When May and Newland announce their marriage, Mrs. Manson Mingott has the church pews measured, but they prove too small for her. Despite her condition—somewhere between invalidism and disability—Mrs. Manson Mingott receives numerous visitors, is abreast of all the gossip and continues to wield a good deal of social power, an example of what Diane Price Herndl has called "invalidism as a pursuit" (1993: 111). In a way, Mrs. Manson Mingott can be likened to James's luminous invalid *The Wings of the Dove*'s Milly Theale, who is similarly unconventional and charismatic.

Throughout the narrative, Ellen's unseen husband, Count Olenski, makes several attempts to reclaim his wife. After first successfully discrediting her morally, by

implying she had an affair with his secretary, and thereby ruining her divorce proceedings, he then offers to return some of Ellen's money if she agrees "...just to sit at the head of his table now and then." (Wharton 1986: 232 and film) But Ellen, like Lily Bart, refuses to participate in exchanging the commodity of her person for money, though she suffers a good deal less than Wharton's ill-fated heroine of *The House of Mirth*. Though Mrs. Manson Mingott would rather see Ellen return to her husband, she finally decides in favour of making Ellen financially independent, allowing her to return to Europe. [8]

Ellen profits from her grandmother's liberal attitude in the end. Mrs. Manson Mingott's elevated position in the social hierarchy, her wealth and her love of unconventionality allow her to see the necessity of her granddaughter's independence. Wharton's earlier works, such as *The Old Maid* and *The House of Mirth*, show female characters trapped in painful situations, thoroughly unable to remove themselves. *The Age of Innocence* breaks with this convention, and interestingly it is a woman's money that allows Ellen to escape the stifling moral atmosphere in New York, where she no longer belongs, to conduct her life with (one imagines) relative freedom in Paris.

The core of the narrative of *The Age of Innocence* is the thwarted love affair between Ellen Olenska and Newland Archer. Their attraction rests initially in a perceived mutual affinity for art and literature, but it is clear from the first moment he glimpses her at the opera, that Newland is sexually fascinated by Ellen, a fascination often revealed by the way he observes her clothes, which I will discuss in detail later. While Newland claims to care about art and literature, it is Ellen who truly demonstrates her love of the arts. In the adaptation, Newland is too troubled to enjoy his monthly shipment of books from London. He idly strokes their leather-bound surfaces while the

[8] This event is mirrored by Wharton's experience, as she achieved independence much like Ellen, though she inherited her mother's fortune quite early in her married life, making her separate home in Paris well before she finally divorced her husband in 1913.

voiceover tells us he feels he is being suffocated by his impending marriage. Later, we see him paging idly through a book of Japanese prints, while May remarks that she misses when he used to read poetry to her. Newland's single trip to the theatre (as opposed to the opera) shows him enjoying a traditional melodrama of the period, *The Shaughraun* which he sees even when he is abroad—Beaufort remarks that he travels "to get away from it" and the conservative tastes of 1870s New York. While Newland has expressed unconventional views around the family dinner table, he has never acted on any of these ideas. While he claims to believe that women deserve the same rights as men (Wharton 1986: 41 and film) he still counsels Ellen to remain married. When it comes to acting on his expressed ideals of intellectual and social freedom, Newland fails. Ellen, on the other hand, expresses her love of the unconventional in many discernable ways. When Newland first visits her house, he is struck by the way she has decorated. In the adaptation, the camera pans over paintings that evoke the Impressionists, while the other art that appears in the film conforms to a more neoclassical style. The walls of her sitting room are deep red, and her furniture is clearly arranged for comfort. Another of Ellen's rooms is decorated with touches of the oriental: a bamboo screen, silk pillows, a leopard skin carpet, and a symbolist painting by Fernand Khnopff that depicts a youth and a sphinx entitled *L'Art/Les caresses* (1896) (Figure13). It is also implied that Ellen does indeed attend the scandalous Sunday entertainments thrown by social parvenus and frequented by actors and musicians. Ellen acts on her tastes and desires for these things, while Newland it seems, continues to genuinely enjoy the conventional.

Visualing desire through flowers and dress in *The Age of Innocence*

Despite social convention, Newland and Ellen are immediately drawn to one another. In the adaptation, the erotic pull of their unconsummated desire is subtly represented in the symbolic use of flowers and certain colours. Flowers, still a gift of

some luxury, have always held a strong symbolic position for Wharton, and Scorsese takes his filmic cues from her textual association of particular flowers with the three main characters. May Welland, from the moment she is introduced into the narrative, is arrayed in white. Clair Hughes explains this tradition in *Henry James and the Art of Dress*

> Since the late eighteenth century white has been considered the appropriate colour for the 'best' dresses of children and unmarried girls; in France in particular, 'no ornaments with the exception perhaps of a single bracelet, are allowed to the *jeune fille*; her dress must be white; the flowers in her hair white also…(2001: 52)

In the adaptation, May appears exclusively in white evening dresses, with accents of silver, accessorized with white, or pink flowers, until well after her marriage to Newland. We are told that she always carries a bouquet of lilies of the valley, (Wharton 1986: 22) and that her bodice at the opera is "fastened with a single gardenia"(Wharton 1986: 6). In the film, before we even see May at close range, we see the bouquet of lilies in her lap, and delicate pink roses in her hair. Newland rejoices in the idea of married life with May, describing it as "this whiteness, radiance, goodness at one's side." (Wharton 1986: 23) A lily of the valley is small, white, waxy and fragrant, but hardy despite its delicacy, the most discreet and virginal of lilies. The scene in the conservatory describes Newland breaking off a small stem and fingering it (Wharton 1986: 24), and when the adaptation employs the same image, it communicates Newland's longing to be close to May, but also his desire to break open her inner thoughts. May's closed personality, "the vacant serenity of the young marble athlete" (Wharton 1986: 141) her "vague, inexpressible girlishness" and later "her incapacity to recognize change" (Wharton 1986: 348 and film) is reflected in her association with the demure lily-of-the-valley and the eternal whiteness of her "invincible innocence."(Wharton 1986: 145) Stella Bruzzi, in her book *Undressing Cinema,* corroborates this with her observation that "May is presented as an innocent, cocooned

in lace, muslin, and organza against a complex world." (Bruzzi 1997: 50) Winona Ryder who plays May in the film is a pale, cool-looking girl, with delicate limbs, though she imbues May's later actions with a core of resilience.

In stark contrast to May, Ellen is associated with yellow roses, an intensely scented flower that can range from buff to a deep mustard with touches of orange and red. Michelle Pfeiffer as Ellen Olenska has golden blonde hair that contrasts with Ryder's performance of May as a delicate brunette. This pairing of a tall, striking blonde and petite brunette can also be seen in the adaptation of *The Golden Bowl*, with Uma Thurman as Charlotte Stant and Kate Beckinsale as Maggie Verver. Scorsese expresses the connection between Ellen and Newland's bouquet of yellow roses in a swirling, musical sequence of her arranging the yellow roses and smiling, her hair sparkling, mingling with the intense yellow of the flowers; the scene ends in an intense colour dissolve of golden yellow. This association of vibrant yellow roses with Ellen is an image Wharton employs in the novel, and the adaptation takes its visual cues from the following passage:

> [Newland's] eye lit on a cluster of yellow roses. He had never seen any as sun-golden before, and his first impulse was to send them to May instead of the lilies. But they did not look like her—there was something too rich, too strong, in their fiery beauty. In a sudden revulsion of mood, and almost without knowing what he did, he signed to the florist to lay the roses in another long box, and slipped his card into a second envelope, on which he wrote the name of the Countess Olenska…(Wharton 1986: 79)

Ellen, it seems, encourages excessive blooms. In the adaptation and the novel, Beaufort sends her red roses, which enrage her—"Who is ridiculous enough to send me a bouquet? I am not going to a ball, and I am not engaged! Some people are always ridiculous" (Wharton 162 and film)—a gesture that lacks subtlety with its implication that Beaufort has entered Ellen's affections. The above passage from the novel also introduces the unwitting beginning of Newland's feelings towards Ellen, which the

adaptation expresses in increasingly open, ornate button-holes for Newland, who could "...never think of appearing in society without a flower (preferably a gardenia) in his buttonhole."(Wharton 1986: 5) This use of increasingly open, white flower boutonnières, particularly gardenias and camellias—again highly scented, exotic flowers—are a visual expression of Newland's only external, public expression of his emotions. Even today, flowers are a gift that signal emotion, florists often market their wares as a way to avoid having to express awkward emotions: apologies, condolences, illness, death. Newland is the inarticulate lover whose gift of yellow roses goes unacknowledged, but not misunderstood by his beloved. Ellen understands his gift all too well. When she sees him at the performance of *The Shaughraun* she remarks, referring to the parting lovers on the stage: "Do you think...he will send her a bunch of yellow roses tomorrow morning?" (Wharton 1986: 117 and film) She lets Newland's gift go without thanks, because unlike Wharton's more naïve heroines Lily Bart, and Nan St. George, Ellen knows the price that can be exacted for such gifts.

The contrasting symbolism of lilies-of-the-valley for May, and roses and orchids for Ellen, is also played out in their dress. While May appears predominantly in white or pale colours, Ellen is gowned in deep blues, greens, and scarlets, or exotic silks and furs. May, as the film's voice-over makes clear "represented for Archer all that was best in their world, all that he honoured, and she anchored him to it," while Ellen, in the words of Gloria Erlich in *The Sexual Education of Edith Wharton*, "represents vitality, sensual sophistication, 'European' or bohemian values." (1992: 133) Erlich goes on to offer the following argument:

> ...[B]y investing in the figure of the now-lost Ellen all that is desirable in woman, he [Newland] can see May only as Ellen's opposite—invincibly virginal, even boyish, and thoroughly immune to culture. Cherishing his image of the banned Ellen, he never allows himself to love May; he fails to bring out or develop the latent woman in her. One could think of May as a victim, a sleeping beauty whom Newland Archer declines to awaken because he is too attached to the image of her opposite. (1992: 133)

Erlich argues that Newland projects his desires onto Ellen and May from the beginning of the story. Newland's perception of May and Ellen's roles in relation to himself is reflected in their dress, but also, the symbolic meaning of their dress becomes part of how he perceives them. If Ellen is sensual and exotic, then everything from her sofa cushions to her hairstyle will seem so to Newland. If May is pure and innocent, then Newland can easily conclude, mid-honeymoon, that "there was no use in trying to emancipate a wife who hadn't the dimmest notion that she was not free." (Wharton 1986: 195 and film)

In the same adapted sequence where Newland and Ellen declare their love, they also admit that they can never be together—"you are the woman I would have married if it had been possible for either of us." (Wharton 1986: 168 and film) After they agree to part, and once May's telegram arrives announcing that she and Newland can be married after Easter, Newland kisses the end of the ribbon that hangs at the back of Ellen's dress. (Figure5.1) It is a remarkable moment, and seems to perfectly express the longing of both characters. In her novels, Wharton makes great use of the opera and the theatre, as public arenas for dress, and for heightened emotion, a function replicated by real social practices of the time, as Maureen E. Montgomery explains in her book *Displaying Women: Spectacles of Leisure in Edith Wharton's New York*, "attendance at the Academy [of Music] on Monday and Friday, the fashionable nights, bestowed distinction and announced one's class affiliation and one's access to material wealth and cultural knowledge. (Montgomery 1998: 31)

Both the novel and the adaptation of *The Age of Innocence* open with scenes from the opera *Faust*, but later refers to a scene in a popular melodrama, *The Shaughraun*:

> There was one episode in particular that held the house from floor to ceiling. It was that in which Harry Montague, after a sad, almost

> monosyllabic parting with Miss Dyas, bade her goodbye and turned to go. The actress…wore a grey cashmere dress,…Around her neck was a narrow black velvet ribbon with the ends falling down her back. …On the threshold he paused to look at her, stole back, lifted one of the ends of velvet ribbon, kissed it, and left the room without her hearing him or changing her attitude. …in its reticence, in its dumb sorrow, it moved him more than the most famous histrionic outpourings ….On the evening in question the little scene acquired an added poignancy by reminding him—he could not have said why—of his leave-taking from Madame Olenska…(Wharton 1986: 113-114)

The adaptation reproduces this scene from *The Shaughraun*, almost directly before the confrontation between Newland and Ellen, repeating the actions of the melodrama, to visually communicate the sublimation of desire. In the film and novel, *The Shaughraun* symbolizes Newland's middlebrow taste, and yet when Newland enacts this leave-taking scene with Ellen, it is as moving for the film audience as it is for Newland as a theatre spectator. This use of images and actions that appear clichéd or melodramatic occurs throughout this cycle of films, and yet the way these images and actions are employed within a film of are often highly evocative. It is these shifts in context that help revitalize tired images and show the adapted stories in a new light.

Throughout the narrative, Ellen Olenska is made exotic. In her essay "Wharton, Race, and *The Age of Innocence*" Anne MacMaster tells us "Newland heightens the erotic aspects of Ellen's character by projecting the mystique of the 'Orient' onto her drawing room," (1999: 194) and this adds to her allure of difference and sensuality for Newland. MacMaster even suggests that "Newland desires not a particular person, but an Other, a romanticized or demonized version of his self." (MacMaster 1999: 195) This feeling is echoed in his perceptions of Ellen's house when he calls on her at home for the first time:

> He had been before in drawing rooms hung with red damask, with pictures "of the Italian school;"…something intimate, "foreign," subtly suggestive of old romantic scenes and sentiments…and in the vague pervading perfume that was not what one put on handkerchiefs, but rather like the scent of some far-off bazaar, a smell made up of Turkish coffee and ambergris and dried roses. (Wharton 1986: 70)

The adaptation shows Ellen's first drawing room as dark red, littered with small, obscure masks and paintings. In the scene of confession between her and Newland, there is a different room with oriental screens of bamboo, the aforementioned sphinx painting above the mantle, and a leopard rug. The scent of the exotic described by Wharton has been interpreted for the visual world through references in furnishings to the Far East and Africa; these visual cues are echoed in the fabric of Ellen's dress in this scene, though pale blue and trimmed in lace, the heavy silk has a *japonaiserie* pattern.(Figure 7) In *Henry James and the Art of Dress*, Hughes confirms "...the oriental had been an alternative minority fashion since the 1860s, ...[specifically] *japonaiserie*—that is, the introduction of oriental objects or motifs into western clothing, interiors and paintings." (2001: 147) The pale blue dress fits in with what Wharton describes as a simple dinner dress: "a close-fitting armour of whaleboned silk, slightly open at the neck, with lace ruffles filling in the crack, and tight sleeves with a flounce uncovering just enough wrist to show off an Etruscan gold bracelet or a velvet band." (1986: 104)

Later in the novel and the adaptation, after Newland and Ellen have not seen one another in over a year, he tries to call on her while at Newport. He finds the house empty, but he glimpses a particular object, a pink parasol, lying on the verandah "[it] drew him like a magnet: he was sure it was hers. He went into the summer-house and, sitting down on the rickety seat picked up the silken thing and looked at its carved handle, which was made of some rare wood that gave out an aromatic scent. Archer lifted the handle to his lips." (Wharton 1986: 225-226) The adaptation also enacts this scene of Newland engaging in a lover's secret behaviour, smelling the handle of the parasol as if it contains some essence of the woman. As it turns out, the parasol belongs to one of the daughters of Ellen's friends, but the exotic scent, (I always imagine it is

sandalwood) something which can barely be portrayed on film, lets Newland believe he can know and appreciate Ellen through her clothing.

Wharton's novel instructs us that dinner dresses like the pale blue gown worn by Michelle Pfeiffer in the film, would also have been worn to receive evening callers, but when Newland comes to have his discreet talk with Ellen in an attempt to dissuade her from divorce, she wears something quite different:

> Madame Olenska, heedless of tradition, was attired in a long robe of red velvet bordered about the chin and down the front with glossy black fur. Archer remembered, on his last visit to Paris, seeing a portrait by the new painter, Carolus Duran, whose pictures were the sensation of the Salon, in which the lady wore one of these bold, sheath-like robes with her chin nestling in fur. There was something perverse and provocative in the notion of fur worn in the evening in a heated drawing-room, and in the combination of a muffled throat and bare arms; but the effect was undeniably pleasing. (Wharton 1986: 104)

Bruzzi claims "*The Age of Innocence*, in its treatment of the image as well as the narrative, is a total fetishistic experience," (1997: 49) and the above passage from the novel confirms Wharton's awareness of the erotic power of dress and image. As readers and spectators to this story, we are often treated to lavish views of dress, but rarely with the open desire implied by Newland's view of Ellen in the fur-trimmed dress. A similar version of the dress appears in the film: a burgundy velvet robe trimmed in feathers and organza, with long, tight sleeves. The film's version of this dress also signals Newland's growing sexual fascination with Ellen.Valerie Steele, in her book *Fetish: Fashion, Sex and Power*, tells us that "Freud believed that fur and velvet symbolized the pubic hair," (Steele 1996: 146) while the notorious Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, author of the novel *Venus in Furs* extolled the powerfully erotic combination of a woman in fur lying on red velvet cushions. (Steele 1996: 144) This dress in particular, even more than Ellen's Josephine dress, demonstrates her unconventionality and her sensuality. In tandem with her blue Japanese silk and her avant-garde sitting rooms, Ellen's sheathe-like robe gestures towards the dresses of Poiret and Fortuny, the new silhouette that would be

fashionable almost thirty years later, as we will see in a forthcoming chapter on the adaptation of James's *The Wings of the Dove.*

A further instance of the conflation of sex and clothing occurs in the carriage scene between Newland and Ellen, "...he passionately unbuttons her glove and kisses her exposed wrist, an action that is filmed with the same slow, sensuous dissolves as is much of the would-be love story. The pity is unbearable: pulling all the stops for *this*?" (Bruzzi 1997: 53) Bruzzi finds this scene filled with pity for the unfulfilled lovers, but I would see this scene as exquisite in its sublimation, in the subtlety of its forbidden eroticism, and much more in accordance with Bruzzi's assertion that the entire film is a fetishistic experience. Rather than change the action of the story for contemporary tastes by inserting a scene of greater sexual explicitness—as do the other five adaptations in this cycle—Scorsese films this scene with the same filmic techniques accorded to on-screen sex. The unbuttoning of the glove becomes as sexually charged as the final button on a shirt or a stocking's clasp. At the time, gloves were still an essential item of public dress for both sexes, and the Beaufort ball sequence lingers over a table laid out with sets of white men's gloves, and for a woman to remove her gloves in public would have been quite unthinkable. Several of the dinner sequences show women eating and drinking with the fingers of their gloves tucked into the fabric surrounding the wrist. This way, the fingers of the glove would remain unsoiled, and wrists and forearms remain covered, and the woman could easily readjust her glove after dinner to cover her hands once more. Alison Gernsheim, in her book *Victorian and Edwardian Fashions*, indicates that throughout the nineteenth century, gentlemen would have used anywhere from two to six pairs of gloves a day—"...no gentleman would ask a lady to confide her hands to gloves he had worn before dinner," (1981: 35) while "[l]adies were supposed to wear gloves indoors as well as out, except at meals." (1981: 35) Therefore, Newland's unbuttoning of Ellen's glove takes on a much more sexual significance:

"…he bent over, unbuttoned her tight brown glove, and kissed her palm as if he had kissed a relic." (Wharton 1986: 285) When they first meet at the opera in the film, Ellen holds out her hand in a way that suggests she is used to it being kissed, and Newland awkwardly shakes her hand because what Ellen expects is not the custom in New York. In the carriage Newland, normally such a paragon of form and correctness, finds himself unthinkingly in a massive breach of etiquette in an effort to express his passion, for there is nothing correct left in his behaviour.

Indicating the boundaries of decorum through voiceover and camera technique

Robert K. Martin tells us "*The Age of Innocence*…employs the small gesture as an assertion of power—most striking in May's triumphal dinner. The horror it produces resides in the unspoken…". (2000: 57) In a society inhabited by "…people who dreaded scandal more than disease," (Wharton 1986: 335) it is easy to surmise what this horror could be. In the case of May's dinner, which prefaces her climactic revelation in both novel and film, Newland finally realizes his place in an unspoken scandal:

> And then it came over him, in a vast flash made up of many broken gleams, that to all of them [the dinner guests] he and Madame Olenska were lovers, lovers in the extreme sense peculiar to "foreign" vocabularies. He guessed himself to have been, for months, the center of countless silently observing eyes and patiently listening ears, he understood that, by means as yet unknown to him, the separation between himself and the partner of his guilt had been achieved, and that now the whole tribe had rallied about his wife… (Wharton 1986: 335)

The film uses much of the above passage in this scene's voiceover, but Newland's revelation is also interpreted visually, as the camera forms an iris of shadow around his narrowed eyes, as he silently realizes that he has been sleepwalking through society, while his entire social set has been more than aware of his breach of etiquette. This visual emphasis placed on a subtle range of facial expressions is characteristic of this cycle of adaptations, where, following Barthes, textual meaning is often 'passed' into cinematic significance in this way. Newland and May's set have, in fact, assumed

the worst: that he and Ellen have been carrying on a passionate and physical sexual affair. The perfect veneer of gentility being performed by his wife and their friends, and even by Ellen takes on sinister undertones. Throughout this scene, May smiles happily as Newland looks more and more uneasy. His conversation turns to travel and his guests hasten to purify his intent: he wants to signal to Ellen that he intends to follow her to Europe, while the others spout platitudes ("you must have three weeks to do India properly") to draw the focus away from Ellen's move to Paris. The oldest and most respected of the 'tribal elders', the Van der Luydens, escort Ellen home after dinner, ensuring the suspected lovers have no time to incite further scandal.

Though Ellen exits the narrative surrounded by pillars of the community whose aim is to protect both her, and as the adaptation puts it, "their exquisitely refined sense of tribal order," she also enters the narrative as the author of several errors in decorum. The first words of dialogue in the film, "I didn't think the Mingott's would have tried it on,"(Wharton 1986: 11) are a reference to Ellen's scandalous social status as a Europeanised American and as a woman seeking divorce, a position that is not ameliorated by her revealing French gown. The film employs an early cinema technique of emphasis—the iris—so the first shot of Ellen is seen through the lens of a pair of opera glasses, encapsulating Ellen, May, and Mrs. Welland in a shadowy oval. This shot indicates a narrative focus on these women, and also implies a voyeuristic, gossipy interest in them on behalf of the men. This technique not only draws attention to theoretical notions of the gaze, but it consciously puts these theories into practice by embodying what Laura Mulvey has described as "[t]he determining male gaze project[ing] its fantasy onto the female figure." (1999: 62)[9]

[9] Wharton has a very detailed grasp of the male gaze, and uses it to devastating effect in *The House of Mirth*, as will be discussed later in this thesis.

Having Ellen appear at the opera on the evening of the Beaufort ball, flanked by respectable female relatives, is the act of a family secure enough in its social position to weather scandal. Public instances of lapses in decorum, in both the adaptation and novel of *The Age of Innocence*, are noted mainly by the economy of gazes, with little verbal comment, as these acts occur in the public arena, observing the rule of silence—the 'real thing' that cannot be said— enforced by the hieroglyphic world. As previously mentioned, both film and novel have a scene in the theatre. After Newland witnesses the lovers' leave-taking scene in *The Shaughraun*, he goes to see Ellen in one of the boxes. The last time he saw her, had been to urge her to give up her divorce. The other people in the box are distracted by conversation, and Ellen quietly acknowledges this clandestine moment with a remark about the yellow roses Newland has anonymously sent to her. Newland has been thinking of how the play reminded him of his last visit to Ellen, and how both times he has called on her, he has anonymously sent yellow roses. Ellen then tells him that "what you urged me to do was right" (film) and that she has given up pursuing a divorce. As with Ellen's previous appearance at the opera, they are both framed in an iris just after finishing this conversation, focusing the viewer's attention down to these two characters, while also indicating that the collective gaze of society is upon them. Newland and Ellen believe their conversation to be unheard or unnoticed by their fellow audience members, but the film uses the iris to reinforce the idea that "this was a world balanced so precariously that its harmony could be shattered by a whisper." (film voiceover)

In the opening scenes of the Beaufort ball, we are introduced to the character of Sillerton Jackson: "He carried with him, like a calling card, an entire register of the scandals and mysteries that had smouldered under the unruffled surface of society for the last fifty years."(voice-over) Jackson acts as the messenger for lapses in decorum in both novel and film. Part of his role in society is, as Wharton puts it, "…the

investigation of his friends' affairs [with] the patience of a collector and the science of a naturalist." (1986: 32) It is Sillerton who remembers the details of Ellen's marriage and circulates them at the ball. He is also present when Newland expresses his modern views regarding Ellen's social position at the family dinner table: "Why shouldn't she be conspicuous if she chooses? Why should she slink about as if it were she who had disgraced herself?" (Wharton 1986: 40 and film) The Archer dining room serves on two occasions as the platform for the revelation of breaches in decorum, and Wharton's words set the scene by revealing that "Mrs. Archer was a shy woman who shrank from society; but she liked to be well-informed as to its doings…[while her daughter] Janey was subject to starts and aberrations of fancy welling up from springs of suppressed romance."(1986: 33-34) With a nod to this description, it is Janey who acts as another messenger: she introduces the news that Ellen is seeking divorce, and later, that Beaufort is openly living with his mistress. The verbal revelation of social error in private spaces such as the family dining room, Newland's library and Newland and May's personal sitting room are the only spaces in which the 'unmentionable horror' of lapses in decorum in the hieroglyphic world can be discussed.

The most important moment of revelation that is also a violation of decorum comes just after the farewell dinner for Ellen. May comes in to discuss the evening with Newland, and he finally blurts out his desire to go on an extended round of travel, a guise for escaping his present life. Up until this moment Newland still believes "nothing, therefore, was to prevent his following her [Ellen, to Europe] and once he had taken the irrevocable step, and had proved to her that it was irrevocable, he believed she would not send him away." (Wharton 1986: 329) Hearing Newland's plan, May, just as she once nixed the idea of inviting a 'common' Frenchman to dine, gently reveals that she is expecting their first child: "I've been sure of something since this morning and I've been longing to tell you." (Wharton 1986: 342 and film) When Newland asks who

else knows, May reveals that she has told her mother, his mother, and Ellen. Newland suddenly asks why she told Ellen she was pregnant two weeks ago, and May replies: "No, I wasn't sure then. But I told her I was. And you see, I was right." (Wharton 1986: 343 and film) May's strategic statement has come just before Ellen and Newland were to consummate their affair, and faced with the prospect of Newland's imminent paternity, Ellen returns "the key to his release,"(voiceover) the key to his rooms he had sent her for their assignation, in what the novel calls "[t]his retort to his last appeal…." (Wharton 1986: 329)

Because *The Age of Innocence* takes place within a hieroglyphic social world, breaches in decorum are largely identified and played out in private, while the punishments are public. Julius Beaufort loses his money and is cast out of the upper echelons of society, as is his wife Regina. His misfortune is discussed at the intimate Archer family dinners, and casually amongst men's after dinner conversation, but the punishment of no longer being invited or received anywhere is publicly noted. Newland and Ellen's affair is never discussed by anyone in the novel or the adaptation, though it is alluded to, especially in the balcony scene at *The Shaughraun*, when the iris closes in on the couple. But their punishment is meted out at the farewell dinner, where the guests permit not even a moment of private conversation between the two. While Newland slowly realizes he is little better than "a prisoner at the center of an armed camp" (Wharton 1986: 335 and film) Ellen knows her only option is to leave New York entirely.

Breaches in decorum in *The Age of Innocence* can occur on a grand scale, resulting in a truly public scandal, or they can be an act or even a style of dress that somehow transgresses the firmly held social beliefs of New York society in the 1870s. Social errors, though often committed by individuals, are sometimes committed by the

society as a whole, in order to make a point, resulting in what Singley calls hierarchies of discourse as domination. Ellen Olenska, it seems, has been contravening New York society decorum since birth. It is said her parents were "continental wanderers, …lavishing on her an expensive but incoherent education." (film and Wharton 1986: 58-59) After her parents' early death Ellen was raised by an eccentric aunt, who does not appear in the film[10]. In the novel, this aunt resembles the bizarre and frivolous Countess Gemini of *The Portrait of a Lady*. The rumour of Ellen's divorce, and this knowledge of her unusual upbringing, is coupled with Newland's mother's telling remark "What can you expect of a girl who was allowed to wear black satin at her coming-out ball?" (Wharton 1986: 39 and film) By today's standards, and even a few years after the story takes place, wearing black was considered quite respectable, even outside of mourning dress. However, at the time Ellen would have made her social debut, the dominance of white dresses for unmarried girls, particularly at a coming-out ball, would have been in full force. Maureen E. Montgomery in *Displaying Women* observes:

> On the one hand, coming-out rituals necessitated display in order to draw attention to the young woman's change in status. This was coded visually. The requisite white gown, signifying her virginity in the traditional manner, marked the debutante out from the rest of the women present. The dress, often made of tulle or chiffon, symbolized her feminine delicateness. Floral bouquets, heavy with scents signifying purity and innocence, added their symbolism to the coded sexuality and fragility of the feminine. (Montgomery 1998: 50)

Clair Hughes tells us of fashion historian Anne Hollander's theories on the connotations of black dress: " 'A lady in black,' according to Hollander, 'is not only dramatic and dignified but also dangerous.'" (2001: 48) A debutante in black is not girlish and innocent as she is supposed to be, but appears sophisticated and sexually aware, as Hughes tells us:

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[10] The script in Scorsese and Cocks 's companion book to the film, as well as the online version of the complete script (page 7) mention this Aunt Medora Manson, but she evidently never made the final cut.

> The satanic, erotic connotations of black, however, inherited from early Romantic traditions in art and literature were still an optional reading for women's black dresses in the second half of the [19th] century; the furore caused by [John Singer] Sargent's portrait of Mme. Gautreau, *Mme X*, [see Figure 87] in an off-the-shoulder black dress shows how close such meanings lay to the surface. Mme. Gautreau's mother threw a noisy scene in Sargent's studio, declaring her daughter to be the mockery of Paris and a lost woman as a consequence of the portrait. (2001: 48-49)

It is therefore Ellen's past as well as her precarious present, filled with social errors by New York society standards, that allows society to engage in a collective attempt to banish Ellen.

Social mobility and social power

The first instance of an act of social dominantion in the adaptation and the novel is the collective refusal to attend Mrs. Manson-Mingott's introductory dinner for Ellen. Since this event follows the announcement of Newland and May's engagement, a mass declination of the invitation is, as the film's voice-over puts it "…more than a mere snubbing, …[it was] an eradication." Naturally, the varied excuses provided for the declined invitation are transparent, and this angers and disappoints Newland's mother, who correctly interprets this act for what it is: a demonstration of power. The adaptation interprets this sequence visually by showing food being prepared for a dinner, then an empty kitchen, a series of handwritten notes with the excuses highlighted, and finally a pure red dissolve over Ellen's face at the voice-over's pronouncement of "eradication." Rather than communicate displeasure by icy conversation and disapproving glances, New York declines with "regret" and "unable to accept", maintaining its veneer of politeness, and its code of public silence—the 'real thing' that cannot be mentioned, the 'unspoken horror' that can only be discussed in private.

To remedy this situation, Newland and his mother consult the aforementioned 'tribal elders,' the Van der Luydens. At this meeting, Newland reveals this slight has been orchestrated by one individual: Laurence Lefferts. A minor character, Lefferts is

introduced in the film as "the foremost authority on 'form' in New York."(Wharton 1986: 8 and film) Renowned for his numerous extramarital affairs, Lefferts occasionally needs to create distractions, like the snubbing of Ellen, for his wife, "to show how awfully moral he is." (Wharton 1986: 55 and film) By evading the topic of Ellen's unusual past and potentially scandalous present, Newland manages to repair the social damage to Ellen's position by persuading the Van der Luydens to include Ellen at an even more sumptuous dinner they are hosting for their cousin, the Duke of St. Austrey.

The film's voiceover, as well as the novel describe the Van der Luyden dinner:

> …[D]ining with them was at best no light matter. Dining there with a Duke who was their cousin was almost a religious solemnity. The Trevenna George II plate was out, so was the van der Luyden Lowestoft, from the East India Company, and the Dagonet Crown Derby. When the van der Luyden's chose, they knew how to give a lesson. (Wharton 1986: 61 and film)

The sheer display of formality at this dinner, alongside the objects which represent a long (by New World standards) and distinguished family history, comprise the lesson the Van der Luydens wish to convey: that society will not be dictated to by individuals, and that family connections and support are of the utmost importance. Following her history of unwary social error, Ellen "…came rather late, one hand still ungloved and fastening a bracelet about her wrist; yet she entered without any appearance of haste or embarrassment, the drawing room in which New York's most chosen company was most awfully assembled." (Wharton 1986: 60 and film) Ellen believes herself to be a mere guest, and has no real knowledge of the significance of this event in relation to her precarious social standing. In the adaptation, she later confesses to Newland "I never understood how dreadful people thought I was."

However, during after-dinner conversation, Ellen does something very interesting:

> It was not the custom in New York drawing rooms for a lady to get up and walk away from one gentleman in order to seek the company of another. Etiquette required that she should wait, immovable as an idol, while the men who wished to converse with her succeeded each other at her side. But the Countess was apparently unaware of having broken any rule… (Wharton 1986: 63)

The film narrates the scene in the following way: "It was not the custom in New York drawing rooms for a lady to get up and walk away from one gentleman in order to seek the company of another. But the Countess did not observe this rule." (Figure 3) For this particular instance of a violation of decorum, it is useful to contrast the film and novel directly. Wharton's description is filled with irony, undoubtedly drawn from her own early experiences in New York society. Being forced to endure dull conversation with no possible means of polite escape would have been insupportable for someone who longed for more stimulating fare, as Ellen indicates to Newland, when she comments that the Duke of St. Austrey is "the dullest man I ever met." (Wharton 1986: 63 and film) The film, by omitting Wharton's comments regarding a woman's social immobility, opens up the meaning of this sequence, as to whether Ellen's act is merely a lapse in decorum or a preconceived breach, calling into question whether her past social errors were really that at all, or conscious decisions to flout convention.

After the Countess has sought out Newland across the drawing room and engaged him in conversation for some time, Mr. Van der Luyden comes over to introduce another guest.

> Madame Olenska held out her hand as if to bid him goodbye.
> "Tomorrow then, after five—I shall expect you," she said…
> "Tomorrow—" Archer heard himself repeating, though there had been no engagement, and during their talk she had given no hint that she wished to see him again. (Wharton 1986: 65 and film)

Ellen has sought out Newland's company by committing one breach of decorum, and has secured a visit from him by committing another, albeit an error unknown to anyone except Newland. Rather than conforming to what Wharton describes as the woman as

immovable idol model, Ellen subtly exercises her own will through these small transgressions of social etiquette. When she tells Newland she will expect him, it is in front of Mr. van der Luyden. Newland cannot refuse Ellen without committing a breach in decorum himself, something Ellen seems confident he will not do. Ellen concedes to Newland during his first visit "I suppose I've lived too independently," (Wharton 1986: 73 and film) but that she also wants "…to feel cared for and safe." (1986: 73 and film) Ellen places great importance on the idea of her freedom, which is why she wants a divorce so badly—another serious breach of decorum, as Newland explains, "our legislation favours divorce—our social customs don't." (Wharton 1986: 110 and film) However, she also wants to conform, to feel 'at home' once more in New York, and it is this desire that wins out when she agrees to give up her plan for divorce. But this concession brings no peace, and she eventually returns to Europe, but as a financially independent woman courtesy of her grandmother Mrs. Manson-Mingott.

Throughout Ellen's time in New York, she attends unconventional parties. First, she attends a "French Sunday" (Wharton 86 and film) at the house of a new money arriviste, Mrs. Lemuel Struthers. In the novel, Janey describes it to Newland, while the film alludes quietly to this event in whispered conversation: "All I know is, there was a woman who got up on a table and sang the things they sing at the places you go to in Paris. There was smoking and champagne." (Wharton 1986: 86) Later, Beaufort tries to entice Ellen to one of his own Sunday evening parties: "…join me at Delmonico's Sunday instead. I'm having an oyster supper in your honour. Private room, congenial company, artists and so forth." (Wharton 1986: 105 and film) Maureen Honey, in "Erotic Visual Tropes in the Fiction of Edith Wharton" reveals that "[w]hen [Sarah] Bernhardt visited New York in 1880 just six years after the time at which the novel begins, …no women were allowed to attend a dinner in her honor at Delmonico's, nor were they admitted to an exhibit of her artwork because of her scandalous reputation."

(1999: 91) The 'French Sunday,' however, is an example of a social faux-pas that gradually becomes respectable, just as arrivistes could eventually become more socially acceptable, in the manner of the Beauforts. It is only about two years later that May reveals "Oh, you know, everyone goes to Mrs. Struthers's now; and she was invited to Granny's [Mrs. Manson-Mingott] last reception." (Wharton 1986: 259)

Another social error that makes the transition to respectability is the fashion of wearing the latest Parisian styles right away. Just as Mrs. Struthers's French Sundays have become tolerable, Mrs. Archer laments the fact that they are entering "...an age when ladies were beginning to flaunt abroad their Paris dresses as soon as they were out of the Custom House, instead of letting them mellow under lock and key, in the manner of [her] contemporaries." (Wharton 1986: 257-258) Both the adaptation and the novel show Mrs. Archer relating the story of a society matron who, when she died, had "...forty-eight Worth dresses still wrapped in tissue paper. When her daughters left off their mourning, they wore the first lot to the symphony without looking in advance of the fashion." (Wharton 1986: 258 and film) Hughes remarks that "...mourning for a parent in the 1870s required nine months in black, [and] three months in half-mourning," (2001: 48) which would mean the Worth dresses would be at least a year old, if not more, before they were ready to be worn in New York. Janey reveals "I think it was Julius Beaufort who started the new fashion by making his wife clap her new clothes on her back as soon as they arrived," (Wharton 1986: 258 and film) as much a demonstration of conspicuous consumption as anything else. The original purpose of laying aside Paris dresses is somewhat obscure, but it may be nothing more than American high society in the 1870s being more conservative than Europe, and also it simply taking longer for the latest fashion magazines and trends to reach across the Atlantic. Initially, there are also connotations of 'vulgarity' and 'new money' surrounding the practice of wearing the latest fashions, in the sense that Beaufort is

tolerated, but not always regarded as having the best taste. Later, the practice of wearing the latest styles or updated gowns[11] lost this particular taint of vulgarity, and came to reflect the increasing pace of change and sophistication in New York.

The story *The Age of Innocence*, as a novel and as a film adaptation, shares these themes of desire, wealth, decorum, and social mobility with the other adaptations in this cycle. Scorsese's film is exemplary in its employment of Villasur's notion of form—using period details, especially dress and interior decoration, to create additional dimensions of meaning on screen. These additional layers of meaning constitute a language of objects that contributes to the process of adapting the novel to the screen, a language that continues to be evoked throughout this cycle of films. Ellen's taste for oriental silk and exotic objects introduces the visual association of the oriental with the social outsider, an image that occurs again and again in the other adaptations disucussed here. Taking many visual cues from Wharton's prose, the adaptation of *The Age of Innocence* attempts to convey a cinematic sense of the literary through its use of voice-over narration for social comment, a technique that directly engages the viewer with Bourdieu's notion of art perception. Art and dress in both the adaptation and the novel act as keys to the hieroglyphic social world, one that is fascinating to decipher, particularly in the film's use of paintings to evoke taste and flowers to evoke emotion. It is interesting to note that both film and novel make dress important in the same way: as a detailed visual indication of a character's societal role and personality, a strong element that links these adaptations together. Wharton's highly evocative description of society as a hieroglyphic world not only indicates the kind of detailed social and

[11] At this time, and well into the early 20th century, all couture dresses were still made in Paris, predominantly at the ateliers of Jacques Doucet and Jean-Phillipe Worth. Because the gowns were so expensive, women would send their dresses to be made over for the next season-there is mention of 'having the front panel changed' (Wharton 257) Also, May's wedding dress is "made over for next winter" (Wharton 194)

cultural observation to be found in her own fiction and that of James, but it serves as a touchstone for the shape of my analysis in the subsequent chapters.

Figure 1: Detail of Bouguereuau's The Return of Spring

Figure 2: Detail of Tissot's Political Woman/ L'Ambitieuse

Figure 3: Ellen's red dress at the Van der Luyden dinner

Figure 4: Accessories signal the presence of a male caller

Figure 4.1: Close-up of the initials inside the lining of the top hat indicate the presence of Julius Beaufort

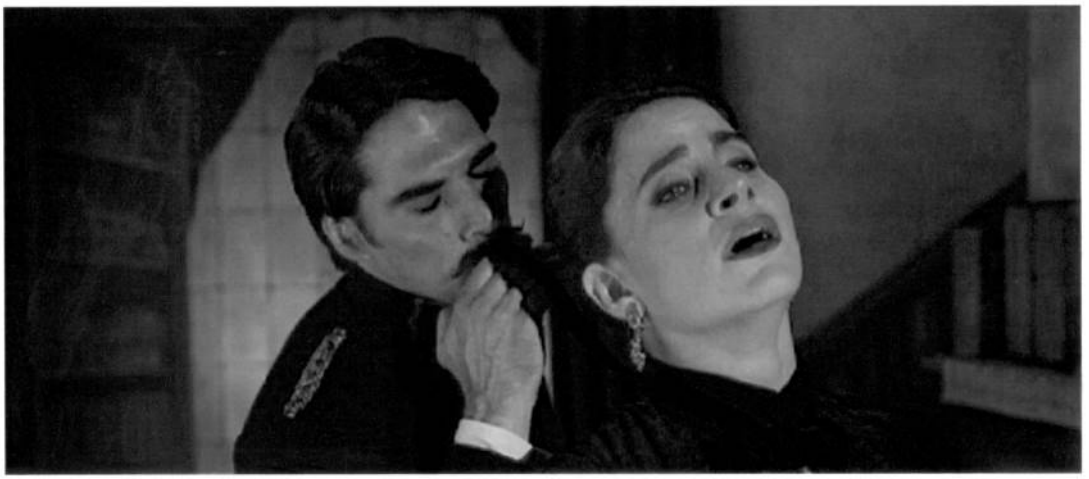

Figure 5: The farewell scene in *The Shaughraun*

Figure 5.1: Ellen's neck-ribbon mirrors that of the actress in *The Shaughraun*

Figure 6: Ellen's oriental sitting room

Figure 7: Newland's fetishistic embrace and detail of the Ellen's blue oriental silk dress

Figure 8: May's made-over wedding dress

Figure 9: The falling coal indicates the passage of time in both novel and film

Figure 10: May's revelation

Figure 10.1: Newland's realisation

Figure 11: Bouguereau's The Return of Spring

Figure 12: James Tissot's Poltical Woman/ L'Ambitieuse

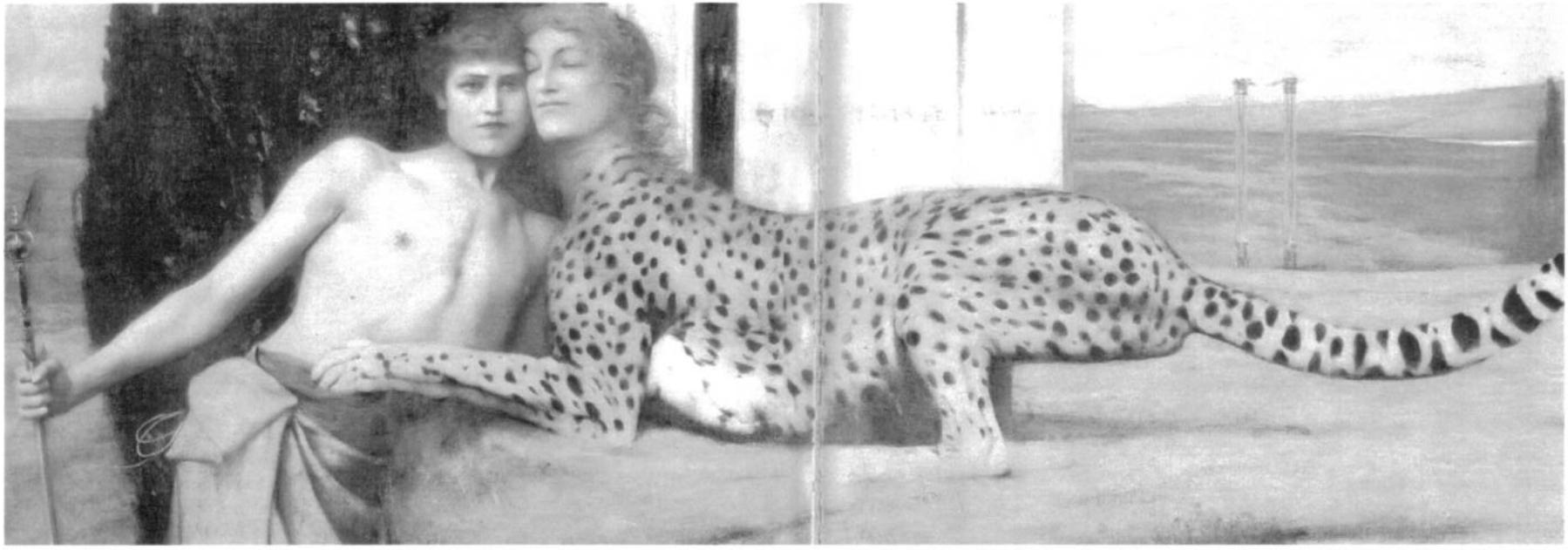

Figure13: Ferdinand Knopff's L'Art/Les caresses

Chapter 3: The Buccaneers

In his introduction to Henry James's unfinished novel *The Ivory Tower* (released in a single edition for the first time in July 2004) Alan Hollinghurst remarks "unfinished works by great writers form a category as haunting as it is unsatisfactory. In gratifying a curiosity about what might have been, they heighten the feeling of loss." (2004: xviii) At her death, Edith Wharton also left behind an unfinished novel, *The Buccaneers*, which was first published in 1938. In 1993, the same year Martin Scorsese released his film adaptation of *The Age of Innocence*, Viking/Penguin released an edition of *The Buccaneers* 'completed' by Marion Mainwaring, perhaps hoping to cash in on both the success of Scorsese's film and the fact that the film-branded, paperback edition of *Age* spent eleven weeks at the top of the New York Times bestseller list. (Hersey 1999: 177) The back cover synopsis for the Penguin edition of *The Buccaneers* draws explicit parallels with *The Age of Innocence*, stressing that both stories share the same time frame: the late 1870s. The back cover also contains an impressive quotation from Henry James biographer Leon Edel, claiming "Mainwaring has added gloss to the story's original elegance and wit, and the novel emerges like a master's painting from the hands of a highly skilled restorer." This metaphor of Mainwaring as restorer is an interesting one, as popular response praised the book while academic critics (Going 1999 and Hersey 1999) were disdainful of both Mainwaring's 'completed' version of the novel and the television adaptation's changes to the character of the Duke. It also demonstrates that while writers like Hollinghurst continue to view James's work in a worshipful, elegiac light, Wharton—despite her Pulitzer and the dogged efforts of American Literature programmes—is less revered. While several authors have recently written novels 'around' James,[12] I believe many would sooner die than attempt to recreate James's written style. In yet another adaptive twist, the five hour television

[12] Colm Toibin's *The Master*, Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty*, Emma Tennant's *Felony*, and David Lodge's forthcoming novel from Viking. (Gussow)

adaptation of *The Buccaneers* first broadcast in 1995 (a co-production between the BBC and the U.S. public television station WGBH) is not actually based on Mainwaring's completed text of Wharton's novel, but is the work of screenwriter Maggie Wadey, working from Wharton's original, incomplete manuscript and notes. "Separately, Wadey and Mainwaring edited and rewrote the story and constructed their own endings, loosely following the story line that Wharton left in her summary." (Bhatti 1995: 2) *The Buccaneers* aired the same year as Andrew Davies's hugely popular adaptation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. While *P&P* proved immensely popular with viewers, *The Buccaneers* vanished rather more quickly. As these two television adaptations are contemporaneous with one another, and because they can be seen as attempting to appeal to a similar audience, *P&P* will serve as an appropriate contrast for *The Buccaneers* throughout this chapter. As *The Buccaneers* involves four protagonists, it is worth giving a brief plot summary here: *The Buccaneers* is set predominantly in England in the late 1870s. It concerns four American girls from nouveau riche families: Virginia and Annabelle (Nan) St. George, Conchita Closson, and Lizzy Elmsworth. Unable to break into New York society, Mrs. St. George hires an English governess, Laura Testvalley, in the hope of 'finishing' her youngest daughter Nan. Under guidance from Laura, Conchita marries the younger son of English nobility, Lord Richard Marable of the Brightlingsea family. With Conchita as their social entrée, Laura encourages the other three 'buccaneers' to take in a London social season. This results in the marriages of both the St. George sisters, with Virginia marrying the elder Brightlingsea son Seadown, and Nan marrying the Duke of Trevennick. Lizzy Elmsworth later marries Hector Robinson, a wealthy politician. While Conchita's and Virginia's husbands both prove to be inveterate philanderers, Nan's husband proves more deeply problematic. The precarious fortunes of the American heiresses rise and fall, as do their husband's social positions. Political debate, class politics and sexual

intrigue in a variety of forms punctuate the drama. The story climaxes with Nan's elopement with her lover Guy Thwarte, and the dissolution of Laura's romance with Guy's father Sir Helmsley.

Adaptation on Television

I have chosen to include this television adaptation amongst the other film adaptations for several reasons. Firstly, Wharton has been adapted far less than James and *The Buccaneers* represents one of the few recent efforts[13]. Secondly, scholarship on adaptation sometimes fails to differentiate between television and film adaptations and while there is a great deal of similarity in the way classic novels are adapted in these two media, there are also key differences, what Sarah Cardwell terms "the increasingly powerful influence of the televisual context" (2002: 82) that is worth considering. Thirdly, Wharton was a popular author of her time. It has been observed that were she writing now, not only might her work be classed as "chicklit" (Solomon, 2004) but it would certainly be adapted for film or television in the manner of Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* and Candace Bushnell's *Sex and the City*.

Andrew Davies's adaptation of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* serves as an interesting televisual comparison for *The Buccaneers.* While Austen's novel is wellknown, *The Buccaneers* is more obscure. Davies's adaptation was popular with viewers, but offered a vision of the past replete with "traditional conservative pastoral Englishness," (Higson 1993: 113) that can be seen in the muted tones of the costumes and rather straightforward (even hackneyed) visual style. Apart from the now infamous addition of two scenes: one of Darcy in the bath, and another of him emerging from a pond, the 1995 adaptation of *P&P* is deeply conventional in terms of style, mise-en-scene and narrative. Although *The Buccaneers* may appear frothy on first inspection, it

[13] *Ethan Frome* was adapted into a film in 1992, but the rural setting and working class milieu of the characters place it outside the criteria of my study, which deals with representations of wealth and upper class habitus.

is somewhat more complicated. The basic story concerns the aforementioned American heiresses. Annabel (Nan) and Virginia St. George, Lizzie Elmsworth and Conchita Closson are all given more or less equal screen time as the story of each of their marriages unfolds over five hours. *P&P* does have the five Bennett sisters, but the adaptation focuses mostly on Elizabeth, and Jane over the course of six hours.

Sarah Cardwell, in her comprehensive study *Adaptation Revisited*, summarises what I feel is one of the key reasons for *P&P*'s appeal as either a novel or an adaptation:

> In *Pride and Prejudice,* Darcy and Elizabeth find apparent freedom of personal expression within the mores of the time, and their desires appear literally in step with their expected behaviour and roles. This imbues their interaction with a certain ease, grace and simplicity, which inspires pleasure in the viewer, the mood is relaxed, 'upbeat', contemplative, romantic. (2002: 147-8)

The 1995 adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* presents the viewer with a relatively uncomplicated vision of romance. The story is wellknown, and the adaptation takes no chances. The insertion of a prim level of semi-nudity from Mr. Darcy is a device that serves only to enrich that character's already considerable erotic appeal with viewers, and neither adds nor detracts from Austen's story. At best, these brief scenes are the beginning of a frank acknowledgement of the gaze of the heterosexual female viewer. Other adaptations under discussion here like *The Wings of the Dove, The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Golden Bowl* also insert scenes of sexuality nudity. For example, in *The Golden Bowl*'s sex scene we see far more of Jeremy Northam's Prince Amerigo than we do of Uma Thurman's Charlotte Stant, but crucially, this scene also serves the interest of the narrative.

While much of the first half of *The Buccaneers* makes suitably light entertainment, there are certainly later scenes that are less palatable to an audience who only wants to be transported to an age of romance, frothy clothes and palatial homes. The adaptation of *The Buccanneers* does not lack the elements of the quality television

serial: the lavish dresses of the four 'buccaneer' heiresses (some taken directly from paintings by James Tissot and John Singer Sargent) are enhanced by lingering shots of heritage properties. Castle Howard, also the location for the classic serial *Brideshead Revisited*, stands in for more than one property. Castle Howard as Brideshead, an image so iconic that one critic states: "the vividness and irresistibility of the screen supplants and dominates our individually imagined versions, so that we cannot ever see Brideshead other than as Castle Howard," (Inglis 2000: 185-186) is a provocative choice of setting for the adaptation of *The Buccaneers.* The use of a clearly recognizable heritage location can be seen as an example of intertextuality between adaptations (Cardwell 2002: 67); however, considering the narrative tone of *The Buccaneers* with its intimations of a decayed aristocracy and a rising professional class, the use of a setting associated with one of the most nostalgic television representations of the British past, is remarkably apt. Castle Howard, which stands in for several different houses in *The Buccaneers*, retains its previous televisual identity as Brideshead, while at the same time providing the rich layers of synthesized meaning that symbolic objects take on in the context of this cycle of adaptations. Alongside Castle Howard, the adaptation of *The Buccaneers* also deploys reproductions of paintings by D.G. Rossetti and Correggio, and even a brief recitation from Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalott,* which I will discuss in detail further on.

A key difference between *Pride and Prejudice* and *The Buccaneers*, regardless of the medium in which they appear, is that while Elizabeth and Darcy find there is room for what we might call self-expression within their social roles, Nan, Virginia, and Conchita (but not Lizzie) all struggle with their social roles in America and England. While the adaptation of *P&P* and Austen's texts in general fit comfortably into the genre of period serial drama, the adaptation of *The Buccaneers*, like its protagonists, struggeles to fit the mould. Erica Sheen makes the following crucial distinction: "In

Austen, infidelity [to the source text] occurs only as a gap within, not a critique of, the forms her novel presents as 'real.'" (Sheen 2000: 18) Wharton's unfinished novel provides a built-in structural gap, leaving it open to "the possibility of omissions and inventions" (Sheen 2000: 17), as well as critique, which is precisely it does with its shifts in character and political intrigues. In her study of television adaptations of classic novels, Cardwell uses *Pride and Prejudice* as the example of the consolidation of the genre, and claims it demonstrates "the confidence of a genre clearly established (and at a peak of popularity)." (2002: 136) She also notes that unlike other TV adaptations of the 1990s, *P&P* resists 'the powerful influence of the televisual.' Cardwell also discusses the more radical 1996 TV adaptation *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of Moll Flanders*, which makes use of the technique of direct address:

> [The presence of this technique] echoes a much wider use of direct address within television (as compared with theatre or film). We are accustomed to this particularly televisual mode of address through its use in primarily non-fiction television programmes, and its use here highlights the specificities of televisual address. (2002: 168)

It is interesting to note that Andrew Davies, the screenwriter for both *P&P* and *Moll* also adapted Anthony Trollope's *He Knew He Was Right* for the BBC in 2004, another adaptation that uses direct address in a way that "forces us to consider whether we would act as [the character] is doing." (Cardwell 2002: 168) This technique has also made its way into at least one Austen adaptation, Patricia Rozema's 1999 film of *Mansfield Park.*

The Buccaneers does not employ this more radical televisual technique, but like the other James and Wharton film adaptations mentioned here, there is an emphasis on sexuality and the woman's perspective. With film adaptations, perhaps because of this focus on female protagonists like Ellen, Kate, Lily, Isabel and Charlotte and Maggie of *The Golden Bowl* the male characters are often less multi-dimensional. In the following chapters I consider criticisms of the film adaptation's portrayals of Merton Densher

(Linus Roache) in *The Wings of the Dove* and Gilbert Osmond (John Malkovich) in *The Portrait of a Lady*. The criticism often leveled at them is that they lack the greater dimensions, the subtlety of motivation allowed them in the novels. In the adaptation of *Portrait* for example, because the narrative focus is on Isabel, Osmond becomes a tyrant, rather than a transposition of James' manipulative dilletante collector. In *Wings*, the focus is predominantly on Kate and Milly, so Merton becomes a pawn, rather than James's equal partner in the plot to inherit Milly's money. In these two films in particular, these two adaptations of what are often considered James's masterpieces, the male characters are frequently stripped of their more varied traits and motivation to serve the plot within the traditional film time limit. Another obvious but important difference between film and television adaptations is the greater number of minutes permitted to the classic television serial. With film, perhaps one can go further visually, or one is less bound by television's censorship rules[14], but television can certainly allow more time for a character to develop. As I will demonstrate later in this chapter, this is particularly the case with the portrayal of the Duke of Trevennick in *The Buccaneers*.

As the story begins, the four young women—the buccaneers—are all living in a resort hotel with their mothers at Newport. Their fathers remain in New York on business and visit only at weekends. In the novel, Wharton has the women living at a hotel in Saratoga, and Mrs. St. George anxiously thinks "...society at Saratoga, now that all the best people were going to Newport, had grown as mixed and confusing as the fashions" (1994: 4) denoting her general inability to keep up with the nuances of fashionable high society. In the adaptation, Mrs. St. George's social anxiety is displayed in her attitude towards Conchita, who is Brazilian: "And who are the Clossons, pray? And where do they come from?" (TV) she asks indignantly. As outsiders, the

[14] The difference between what is acceptable on the screen large or small seems to grow ever closer, particularly since the advent of shows with graphic language, violence and sexual content like *The Sopranos*.

buccaneers and their families are in an even worse position than Ellen Olenska in *The Age of Innocence,* as they have no one to help them decipher the "hieroglyphic world" of society. Although beautiful and wealthy, their family's past is insufficiently distinguished to admit them to the echelons of the New York society described in *Age*. Without a wealthy past, property, and the refined manners required to ensure invitations from "the right people" Virginia, Nan, Lizzie and Conchita are left to amuse themselves. To try and improve Nan's chances, Mrs. St. George hires an English governess, Laura Testvalley. It is clearly established from the beginning in both novel and adaptation that Laura is to act not only as a guide to Nan, but as an advisor to Mrs. St. George and the other girls; Laura is their guide in the social world. Laura's guidance first becomes important when Conchita, manages to become engaged to Lord Richard Marable, the younger son of the poor but aristocratic Brightlingseas. Conchita's marriage provides the social entrée for the other three girls who, on Laura's advice, are taken to London for a social season. As friends of Conchita, now Lady Richard Marable, and with the help of Laura and her American expatriate friend Jackie March, Nan, Virginia and Lizzie all go on to marry Englishmen.

Visualising wealth and desire through the exchange of symbolic objects

As with the other adaptations discussed here, the themes of desire and wealth are intimately connected in *The Buccaneers* and as the television adaptation follows each of the four protagonists, we see these two themes played out in subtly different ways. The first of the girls to marry is also the most sexually aware. Conchita Closson who becomes Lady Richard (played by Mira Sorvino) is passionate, flirtatious and fashionable. Her sophistication is marked early on in both novel and adaptation by her illicit smoking and the gazes of open sexual desire between her and Lord Richard. Both novel and adaptation use a scene where Conchita teaches Nan how to smoke while offering some rather modern views on marriage: "I suppose you like lovemaking better,

eh?" (Wharton 1994: 15) or "I suppose you'd rather be some rich man's mistress?" (TV) is what Conchita asks the innocent Nan. This early introduction of women's smoking as a marker of social freedom and rebellion carries through the adaptation of *The Buccaneers*, and links the four protagonists with the cinematic images of Ellen Olenska, Kate Croy, Lily Bart and Charlotte Stant, all of whom are depicted smoking in eras when this was a slightly scandalous activity for women. While the novel only hints at Conchita's sexual desires, by mentioning how her affair with a younger man, Miles Dawnley, is treated in society—"everyone knew that he was Lady Dick's chosen attendant but everyone found it convenient to ignore the fact" (Wharton 1994: 231)—the television adaptation shows a blatant exchange of gazes between Richard and Conchita over dinner before they are engaged, as well as a scene after their engagement has been announced, where they embrace and then run off into a wooded glade giggling salaciously. This exchange of gazes functions in much the same way as dress and décor, as a visual condensation of the novel's text. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the exchange of gazes in this cycle of adaptations is highly evocative, and must not be considered an 'omission' but an interpretation of the source text.

After their marriage, Richard resumes a dissipated life with Conchita's money, leaving her alone at the family estate and she soon learns to bear his absence by becoming a social success in her own right. Well into the marriage and after the birth of a daughter, Richard and Conchita lead separate lives. As the younger son of the financially ailing Brightlingseas, Richard has almost no income and Conchita's fortune (from a Brazilian coffee plantation and a her stepfather's New York casino) slowly dwindles. In the novel, Richard and Conchita never reconcile and continue with their separate lives. The adaptation makes an interesting change to Richard and Conchita's storyline in this respect. Conchita returns home one evening with her lover Miles and just as they are embracing in the hall, she notices a man's top hat and gloves resting on

a bench. In the film adaptation of *Age* this composition of objects is also used to convey the presence of another male visitor in a woman's house. When Newland calls on Ellen to discuss her divorce, he notices Julius Beaufort's hat and gloves. Newland's gaze is conveyed by a series of close-ups on details of white gloves, an ivory-topped cane, finally revealing the initials JB embroidered on the silk lining of a top hat. (Figures 4-4.1) The use of this particular visual composition, the shot of another man's top hat and gloves, is an example of what Cardwell has identified as the kind of filmic and televisual intertextuality commonly employed by classic adaptations.

> An adaptation's intertextuality—in particular its reference to other adaptations' representations of the past—though a 'postmodern' feature, stabilises and does not fragment our imaginative images of the 'real past.' Far from displaying an 'array of *competing* signs' (Collins, 1992: 331) (my emphasis), the profusion and repetition of generic representations of the past reinforce each other, and the conformity to style across the genre concretizes and perpetuates particular notions of past times… there is a solidity and coherence to the (fictional) 'past world' they concretize. (Cardwell 2002:187)

Although the shot and composition used in *The Buccaneers* is far less detailed than what we see in *Age*, it serves the same purpose: a period specific visual indication of another character's presence.

Once she spots the hat and gloves, Conchita quickly apologises and sends Miles away. She then angrily confronts Richard in the next room "I thought I asked you not to come to the house without telling me first!" she cries. Richard appears nervous and lacks his characteristic swagger. He reproaches her for her affair and lack of fortune, claiming that had her father been solidly rich "things would have been different," at which she scoffs "frankly I doubt it, why should I consider your feelings anymore anyway?" Richard then reveals that he wants to put things right in their marriage, and that he has been diagnosed with syphilis. At this announcement, Conchita's face falls, and she begins to weep at throught of the man she once loved dying miserably. He assures her that it is unlikely she is infected, but she remains upset as she holds and

comforts him. As Richard descends into ill health throughout the rest of the adaptation, Conchita cares for him, but also continues her affair with Miles. Later, she becomes pregnant by her lover and, due to Richard's illness she can no longer "slip back into bed with Richard and pass it off as his," as Miles has suggested. This particular subplot has echoes of the AIDS drama, particularly the way Conchita reacts to Richard's announcement, as if she is already informed of the ravages of his disease, and the way she continues to care for him in his decline.

In another modern twist to Conchita's character, her unwanted pregnancy prompts her to ask Nan, now the wealthy Duchess of Trevennick, for five hundred pounds, and it is implied, since Conchita never produces another child and she confesses to Nan "you see, the baby would not be Richard's," that the five hundred pounds is for an abortion. In the novel, it is merely a loan of five hundred pounds that Conchita requests as neither she nor Richard have any income. It is unlikely Wharton would have envisaged the context the adaptation gives to Conchita's request for money (Figure 19) but Conchita's words remain poignant: "What do you know about being head-over-ears in debt, and in love with one man while you're tied to another—tied tight in one of those awful English marriages, that strangle you in a noose when you try to get away from them?" (Wharton 1994: 249) and "Two hundred pounds would save my life, you darling—and five hundred make me a free woman." (Wharton 254) As compared with the adaptation's dialogue:

> How would you know about having no money, and being tied to one man when you're in love with another, tied into one of those awful English marriages that strangle you in a noose when you try to get away from them… I have nothing, I am stone broke and if I can't raise five hundred pounds I am in big trouble, the worst.

Wharton's novel focuses on Conchita's debts and the social strictures of her aristocratic marriage, but at the same time it is clear that her position as Lady Richard protects her from the realities of what poverty would have meant in America. The changes that

appear in the adaptation give the otherwise frivolous Conchita a deeper side. While her flirtatious sexuality and troubled marriage are appealing to readers and viewers in any time, it is her compassion for Richard and her unplanned pregnancy that close the gap between Conchita in the 1870s and a modern television audience.

When Nan agrees to help Conchita by asking her husband Julius for the money, it also brings into relief her struggle with desire and wealth. While Nan has not been married for her money (as is the case with Conchita and Virginia), she has been married for her innocence. When Nan asks for this money, she has been married for some years and the adaptation shows her transformation from an awkward young girl into a confident, elegant wife and duchess. The early scenes of the impulsive, dreamy girl with loose hair gushing about "the beyondness of things" (Wharton 1994: 114 and TV) and dreaming of an England described by Tennyson, contrasts sharply with the restrained woman with upswept hair, calmly presiding over the seating arrangement of a large dinner. She tries to charm her husband into giving her the five hundred pounds as she no longer receives her father's allowance since a turn in his fortunes. Nan, even as a duchess, receives only a small weekly allowance. Julius does give her the money despite his reservations, but he also views this as an exchange, an exchange that mirrors what nearly occurs between Lily Bart and Gus Trenor in *The House of Mirth*. To Julius, this sum is equivalent to a guarantee of Nan's sexual acquiescence, "she hadn't understood that I'd been driving a bargain with her." (Wharton 1994: 273) The adaptation heightens the drama of this exchange with the knowledge of the Duke's previous rape of Nan. Since her assault and subsequent miscarriage, Nan has always refused his advances.

At this point, it is important to explain that Julius Duke of Trevennick[15] is one of the few truly complex male characters that appears in this cycle of adaptations. While male characters like Merton Densher, Gilbert Osmond, and Adam Verver are far from shallow, they are rarely given the same treatment on screen as their female counterparts. In the case of Julius, particularly in light of changes to his character that appear only in the adaptation, the variety of motivating factors that contribute to his behaviour would be extremely difficult to convey in a two hour film, as opposed to *The Buccaneers*'s five. When we are first introduced to Julius, we see him resisting the wishes of his dominating mother as he obsessively attends to the household clocks. In fact, the first shot of Julius in the adaptation is a section of his face barely visible behind a clock's inner mechanism. The duke's interest in clocks is soon equated, in both novel and adaptation, with the rigidity of his views when he says of Annabel "the great thing is that I shall be able to form her" to which his mother responds, "women are not quite as simple as clocks." (Wharton 1994: 202 and TV) This naiveté is carried through in the portrayal of Julius's courtship of Nan. When they first meet, it is in the ruins of his ancestral castle in Cornwall, where he goes on to entertain Nan and Laura with a lavish tea on the grounds. After Nan and Laura leave, we see a shot of Julius grinning ecstatically and practically skipping back down the path towards the ruins, a clear visual indication of his emotional immaturity.

When Julius proposes to Nan he presents her with a puppy rather than a piece of jewellry, and Nan is so entranced playing with the puppy that she even fails to hear Julius say he wants to marry her. In the adaptation, he tells her "you were born to be princess of Trevennick castle" to which she looks up from playing with the dog, utterly

[15] In the novel he is called Ushant and is Duke of Tintagel. There seems to be no other explanation for the name change other than the fact that the name Ushant was perhaps deemed too unusual for television, which is interesting, considering that, as a character, he is more controversial in the adaptation than the novel. The substitution of Trevennick for Tintagel may be because the ruins of the real Tintagel are not sufficiently accessible (they are located on an eroded outcropping of land) for use as a shooting location.

distracted, asking "what?" This scene takes place only in the adaptation, as the novel moves from a scene of Laura advising the duke, to an abridging letter from another character, Sir Helmsley, implying that the duke is thinking of marrying Annabel, which ends Book II of the novel. Book III begins with Annabel ensconced at the country estate Longlands, two years into her marriage.

The 'engagement puppy' is a useful scene in the adaptation as it superficially conforms to the romance-laden expectations of the classic novel adaptation exemplified by *P&P,* but with a crucial twist. The unexpected puppy in place of the expected ring also acts as a signifier of Nan's naiveté, a naiveté Laura has confirmed when she has previously asked the Duke to allow Nan time to grow up before he considers marrying her. (Wharton 185 and film) In terms of desire, wealth and the economy of exchange, the puppy is a sign that expectations are not in order. A puppy is not something to be offered in exchange for beauty, fertility and innocence. The puppy is also another symbol of Julius's ignorance: the puppy is a suitable gift for a child, or in Nan's case, a girl who appears indifferent to his wealth and title, and this attitude is played out by his behaviour towards her in their first two years of marriage. The 'engagement puppy' is as much a symbolic object as a more traditional gift, as I will demonstrate later in my discussion of Virginia's sapphire necklace and earrings, a visual compression of the character's romantic expectations.

Soon after their return from the honeymoon, the true depth of Julius's ignorance becomes clear when he fails to fulfill even Nan's vague physical expectations of marriage. In a key scene in the television adaptation, Nan tries desperately to broach the subject of sex.

Nan: Julius, do you think I'm pretty?
Julius: I think you're very pretty.
N: My nose, my cheeks, I've got my mother's chin. You know, you've never really kissed me.

J: I've kissed you dozens of times.
N: Not properly.
J: What's that supposed to mean?
N: I don't know, I suppose more uh- all I know is that Ginny said I should put a towel under my pillow and perhaps for the first few days I might not feel very well.
J: Ginny said that to you?
N: Yes, and I remember Connie saying that she spent the whole first week of her honeymoon in bed and I feel perfectly alright, and I thought-
J: Of course you feel alright. You wouldn't want not to feel alright would you?

Throughout this dialogue, there are shots of Julius fumbling with his watch fob, uncomfortably comic evidence that he is both distracted from Annabel's questions by his greater interest and erotically clumsy. This exchange also echoes an earlier joking comment of Conchita's when she asks Nan why she has no children, "Julius does know his way around doesn't he?" The fact that Julius does not 'know his way around' Nan is hinted at in the novel when his mother wonders "was it possible he did not know his rights [over Annabel]?" (Wharton 1994:241) The adaptation intensifies this initially mild trait into a combination of ignorance, immaturity and disinterest.

Representing desire: The Correggios

The only time Julius appears sexually aroused by Nan and tries to initiate sex is the point when the marriage truly begins to unravel: the afore-mentioned assault. He returns late one night from London to discover Nan still awake in her boudoir. In the novel we are told "the Correggio room had always been the reigning duchesses private boudoir" (Wharton 203) and the adaptation shows us this room adorned with three specific Correggio paintings: *Danae*[16], *Leda and the Swan,* and *Venus, Cupid and Mercury (The School of Love)* (Figures 27-29). These are carefully chosen symbolic images, in light of the two key scenes that take place in the boudoir. In the first key boudoir scene, Nan is lying on the floor in her nightgown, smoking and looking at what

[16] Klimt's *Danae* is used to evoke the erotic and financial possibilities of Milly Theale in the film adaptation of *The Wings of the Dove*.

appear to be plans for the restoration of the ruined Trevennick Castle, one of Julius's other interests besides clocks and politics. Julius enters the room, sees Nan, kneels down and begins stroking her legs. A playful game of tag ensues, as Julius and Nan laugh while he chases her around the ornate, candlelit room. Nan is amused at first, and when Julius catches her and kisses her she sighs with pleasure. Seconds later, Julius starts pulling up Nan's nightgown and she begins to protest, telling him 'wait' 'stop' and 'no.' Julius turns from a playful boy into someone else, someone who says 'it's what you've been waiting for isn't it?" as he rapes her. The scene ends with a shot from Nan's perspective as she looks helplessly over Julius's heaving left shoulder at *Leda and the Swan*.

Prior to the assault, we see Nan appreciating the Correggios as images of sensuality, demonstrated in an earlier scene where she actually strokes *Leda*'s central image of the embracing girl and swan. In the painting, the swan sits between Leda's thighs and its sinuous neck forms an 'S' curve ending at Leda's throat, as she inclines her head towards its beak. In the adaptation, the shot shows Nan running her hand from the top of the swan's neck, down to Leda's thigh. Viewing this painting through Nan's eyes during the rape scene, remembering *Leda and the Swan*'s earlier context in *The Buccaneers*, it is impossible not to recall W.B. Yeats's powerful poem *Leda and the Swan*, "her nape caught in his bill/ He holds her helpless breast upon his breast. How can those terrified vague fingers push/ The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?" as well as the myths about Danae and Leda[17]. Both Correggio paintings of *Danae* and *Leda* show young women seduced by Zeus in another form, while the third painting's

17 In addition to the complex visual imagery provided by Nan's relationship to Leda and the Swan, the way her rape is depicted is both televisual and contemporary. Nan's words of refusal are words enshrined in law as the denial of consent. The depiction of her assault recalls the televisual precedents of both the 1967 and 2002 adaptations of *The Forsyte Saga*, where the protagonist Irene is also raped by her husband. In the 60s Forsyte Saga, there is a shot of a locked bedroom door and the sound of Irene's screams. In the 2001 adaptation, we see the brutality of the act itself as Eugenie's controlling husband Soames forces himself on her.

alternative title, *The School of Love* mocks the cruel situation of Nan's marriage and hints at the second key boudoir scene when she and Guy Thwarte admire the Correggios during a Christmas party.

When Julius approaches Nan for sex several months later, this time in her bedroom, she deflects him by physically pulling away, and by implying he takes no interest in her sexually or otherwise with the comment "how would you know what bores me Julius?" His third and final attempt with Nan goes almost as badly as the first, occurring as it does, just after Nan has asked him for the five hundred pounds for Conchita, although she does not reveal this to Julius. Although he refuses at first, Julius later leaves the money tied in a ribbon on Nan's dressing table. The same evening, after their Christmas party, Julius comes to Nan's bedroom to ask for thanks, which Nan offers verbally. As Julius begins to undress Nan becomes nervous, and when he kneels and presses his face to her torso with the words "I've been thinking of you all evening" she says "Julius, please don't." Julius, true to previous form quickly degenerates into adolescent rage "well you took the money! Don't pretend you don't know what it was for" he cries. This scene, as I will demonstrate in a later chapter, is paralleled by the adaptation of *The House of Mirth* where Gus tells Lily "I just want to be thanked a little,"— and where the implication of sex in exchange for money accepted in innocence is the same. As Julius tries to forcibly kiss Annabel, asking her "do you want me to force you, is that it?" she starts to cry and scream. He hits her, she falls to the floor, and remains crying hysterically in a corner of her bedroom while he smashes the contents of her dressing table. Julius, now clearly concerned about someone else hearing Annabel's hysterical cries, urges her "please be quiet" and he finally leaves.

This confrontation is what finally drives Nan from their country estate Longlands for nearly six months as she continually visits friends. Julius, urged on by his

mother, begs Nan to return if only for the sake of her social duties but claims he will not force her because he is "not a monster." When Nan does return, Julius does not come to her room. The dowager wants to be sure Nan has not been having an affair and tells Julius to "leave her in peace" for at least six months. Late one night, Nan is wandering the house when she discovers Julius asleep in bed with his stable groom. The attraction between the two men is alluded to earlier by a single exchange of gazes between Julius and the groom: Julius gazes impassively from the main entrance of the house at the groom brushing the carriage horses; slowly, the groom turns around and smiles, issuing a barely perceptible wink. In his discussion of the homosexual relationships in the film *Another Country,* Andrew Higson comments "the gaze [between gay male characters] is always knowing; there is never any doubt that both the subject and the object are aware of the look," (1993:126) and it is this brief, but nonetheless unmistakable desiring look that indicates Julius's repressed homosexuality in the adaptation. Nan never mentions her discovery to Julius and even though it is later stated she could sue him for divorce because of his homosexuality she refuses to expose him to the publicity this would entail. Like Conchita's acceptance of Richard's syphilis, Nan's sympathy for Julius adheres to Richard Dyer's assertion that "heritage cinema depicts past worlds in which homosexuality was illegal, mocked, despised and persecuted… yet it depicts these worlds, including being gay in them, as attractive."(2001: 48)

In Wharton's novel, the duke is merely timid and immature, there are no hints that he is violent or gay. Even though the adaptation works hard to make him into the sort of man Nan would want to leave, the sort of man a modern audience would expect a woman to leave, he does manage to appear more sympathetic than, for example, John Malkovich as Gilbert Osmond. Despite Julius's cruelty, he seems genuinely repentant when he begs her to return to Longlands. Osmond is always absolutely intentional in his domination and humiliation of Isabel, whereas Julius seems driven by many conflicting

forces: his sense of duty to his social position as an aristocrat, a landlord and a magistrate, his true sexual desire, and his mother. It is largely the scope allowed by the televisual context of this adaptation that permits Julius to exist as a multi-dimensional character.

Between the book and the adaptation: changing the Duke's character

In one of the few critical articles that deals with both Mainwaring's completed version of Wharton's novel and the television adaptation, Eleanor Hershey disagrees strongly with the adaptation's characterization of the duke:

> The scene in which he rapes his wife is explicitly connected to his sexuality, since he is clearly doing so out of a sense of duty to produce heirs and not out of desire for her; even the scene in which he heartlessly forbids his sister's marriage takes place immediately after Annabel has learned his "secret." By weaving elements of the plot together in this way, Wadey assures that her audience will be distracted enough to give in to barely recognized cultural assumptions about nationality, history, gender roles, and sexuality, which often inform one another in surprising ways. (1999: 185)

While the changes in the duke's character that appear in the adaptation are controversial, what seems to bother Hershey most is what she perceives to be "a conflation or confusion of violence and sexual desire" (1999: 185) because, as I have pointed out, the adaptation of *The Buccaneers* conforms in many other ways to the traditional mood and appearance of the classic novel adaptation. Viewed from another perspective, the romantic settings provide a contrast for the violence and deception that does take place within the story. Conchita laments to Nan in the middle of the story "They told us it all ended at the church door" and where traditional adaptations like *Pride and Prejudice* end with a marriage, *The Buccaneers* follows four different marriages, and when tragedy does strike, it comes as even more of a jolt. However, as Cardwell has successfully argued, changes have been afoot with the classic novel television adaptation for some time, particularly since the Davies' adapted *P&P*. A classic television adaptation may retain a certain visual style, conveying certain

expectations, but this does not mean that it will conform to an entirely conservative agenda.

Virginia's storyline: marrying money

The case of Nan's older sister Virginia presents another variation on the twin themes of wealth and desire. Nan tells us in the novel and the adaptation "that Virginia's survey of the world was limited to people, the clothes they wore and the carriages they drove in." (Wharton 110) It is clearly inferred that Virginia is shallow, both because of her golden beauty and her obsession with the trappings of wealth and social position. Virginia is memorably described in both novel and adaptation as "about as expensive to acquire as the Venus de Milo and as difficult to fit into domestic life," (Wharton 1994: 115) equating Virginia's beauty with the wealth and social advantage she will surely acquire in marriage. In the adaptation, Virginia is played by Alison Elliott, who also plays Milly Theale in the film adaptation of *Wings,* a considerably different but equally luminous figure. Virginia is the second buccaneer to marry, and she becomes Lady Seadown, wife to Lord Seadown, heir to the Brightlingsea title and elder brother to Conchita's husband Richard. The scene of Virginia's engagement is of particular interest. As the beauty of the family, Virginia is ear-marked as Seadown's future wife virtually upon her arrival in England. In her efforts to give the St. George girls a London season, Nan's governess Laura has enlisted a co-conspirator in London, Miss Jacky March: "the oracle of transatlantic pilgrims in quest of social opening. These pilgrims had learned that Jacky's narrow front door led straight into the London world." (Wharton 1994: 80) It is Jacky who gives the girls their nick-name of the buccaneers, "the English invaded America, now it's your turn," is how it is put in the adaptation. Jacky is a similar figure to Carrie Fischer in *The House of Mirth* a sort of paid social guide to both the aristocracy (we see her explaining the stock market to Lady Brightlingsea) and the nouveau riche (we hear her cautioning the girls about

Englishmen: "his dullness is always in proportion to his greatness.") Virginia is selected for Seadown in the hopes that her wealth and beauty will induce him away from his longtime mistress Idina and into marriage and the production of a Brightlingsea heir. Independently, Seadown and his mother both look into the stability of the St. George fortune before meeting Virginia, and only then are she and Nan invited to the family seat, Allfriars.

Rather than staying in a hotel, the St. George's rent a house on the river for their London season, a house that happens to be owned by Seadown's mistress Idina. With the assistance of Conchita and the added presence of Lizzie, who soon joins them, "invitations to the cottage [become] as sought after as cards to the Royal Enclosure." (Wharton 128 and TV) The adaptation displays afternoons of punting reminiscent of James Tissot's *Jeune femme en bateau* (1870) (Figure 24) and informal evening parties with games of blind man's buff. Competition for Seadown soon heats up between Lizzie and Virginia. Although Virginia is generally accorded the most beautiful, Lizzy is described as both clever and stylish. Seadown, having no real desire to marry or end his liason with Idina, pays attentions to both girls. The situation peaks when Idina arrives at the cottage one afternoon to retrieve her lover. In the novel, Idina is Lady Idina Churt, an aristocratic playgirl. In the adaptation she is Idina Hutton, an upper class woman of a certain age with no money of her own. It is because Seadown can no longer support her, that she has to let her cottage to the St. George girls. Idina's visit to the cottage makes Virginia and Lizzy aware of her hold on Seadown. In the adaptation, Idina demonstrates her power by boldly emptying Seadown's cigarette case into her own and taking money out of his wallet to play poker with Conchita and Lizzy. When Virginia refuses to play poker on the excuse "girls don't play cards for money in America" (Wharton 1994: 166 and TV) Idina retorts "No. I understand the game you young ladies play has fewer risks, and requires only two players." (Wharton 1994: 166

and TV) Virginia, sensing she is beaten, says nothing. Just as Idina seems about to succeed in forcing Seadown to return with her to London, Lizzy engineers the next strategic move when she asks Virginia in front of everyone whether Seadown has her permission to announce their engagement. The realization that Lizzy is responsible for this turn of events is demonstrated by the exchange of surprised gazes between the others. Again, in this scene, an eloquent exchange of gazes acts as a visual synthesis. As Virginia and Seadown embrace awkwardly for the first time, Conchita glances sadly around at the others, Lizzy is distressed and disappointed, the men are mildly surprised at Lizzy's audacity and possibly, Seadown's decision.

Virginia's greatest moment of emotion in the adaptation comes when her mother presents her with a spectacular sapphire and diamond necklace and earrings on her wedding day. Tellingly, this is the only scene in which Virginia cries, evidently deeply moved by her mother's gift. On this same day, Seadown tells her frankly that he has married her for her money, even his assertion that she is "the most beautiful woman I ever saw" hangs coldly in the air as we see it makes no difference to him. This scene takes place in the unused west wing of the Brightlingsea house Allfriars. Leading his unsuspecting bride into a derelict but clearly once elegant room, Seadown reveals it was once a ballroom. The dusty space, filled with veiled furniture contrasts sharply with the lavish ball and party scenes we see in all the other adaptations. Where the other films show us the decorative and social zenith of wealth, *The Buccaneers* deliberately contrasts its scenes of balls, parties and weddings with evidence of the decline of the inherited wealth of the aristocracy. When Virginia inquires why the rooms are not in use, Seadown simply states that his family has no money. As she sits stiffly on the dusty, veiled furniture, her necklace and bridal gown glitter like a new coin amongst the wreckage of the Brightlingsea past, composing an eloquent visual statement of the story's themes of new wealth and anxiety about social mobility.

Virginia pawns these same jewels several years later when her father's fortunes fail, and then reclaims them when he becomes wealthy again. Virginia's sapphires are the symbol of her acquisitiveness, her hard, bright beauty, and her pride in her married identity as Lady Seadown—which is why she dons them for her final confrontation with Idina—but they also function as fluid currency when she pawns them. Virginia's sapphires are a perfect example of Bourdieu's theory of symbolic goods that also retain their monetary value (Bourdieu 113). The sapphires provide a contrast to Nan's engagement puppy, a clear visual indication of the difference between the sisters' romantic expectations.

The adaptation (but not the novel) allows Virginia an illuminating final confrontation with Idina. With her father's money behind her and her jewels out of hock, Virginia goes to confront the woman she still perceives as her rival, even contending that the sapphires are a present from Seadown in the hope of further demolishing Idina. Idina, still in her beloved cottage but now abandoned by Seadown and developing a gin dependency, candidly tells Virginia "Stick the coronet on your head, wear the necklace and forget him. Thank goodness you have children, which is more than I have. You're an independent woman Lady Seadown, I drink to independent women." When Idina makes the mistake of saying she and Virginia are in similar positions since Seadown has taken a new mistress, Virginia explodes with anger "how dare you compare us! My child is the future Lord Brightlingsea while you are little better than a prostitute", reinforcing the fact that Virginia has absorbed the aristocracy's attitude towards outsiders, particularly if they are women. Idina does get in a final insult with the comment that while Seadown paid her, it is Virginia who must pay Seadown, now that her father has recovered his fortune, reminding Virginia of her marriage's unpleasant foundation. This final confrontation between the normally cold Virginia and the world weary Idina reveals Virginia's true passion: to compete with and triumph over

other women. Virginia is the most ruthless of all the buccaneers. She does not care about love, only money and appearance. The confrontation between her and Idina is followed by a scene in which Seadown asks Virginia to take him back. The fact that his apology follows closely on the news that Col. St. George is wealthy again can hardly be ignored. The emotionless Virginia offers him her hand, signaling her desire to preserve her rank and the image of a successful marriage. Their reconciliation is timely, as Seadown's father dies shortly thereafter, allowing Seadown to inherit the title. In the end, for her, Virginia's beauty and indifference have paid off. Her husband has given up his mistresses, she has produced an heir and succeeded to a noble title and as Idina's previous comment suggests, this is enough for Virginia.

Lizzie Elmsworth: depicting a modern marriage and modern wealth

The great exception to the fate of the other three marriages is Lizzie Elmsworth. Once in the running to marry Seadown, Lizzie soon catches the eye of a young politician, Hector Robinson. Untitled but wealthy, and considerably less stuffy than any of the aristocrats, Hector stands out amongst the other suitors. When they finally marry, he and Lizzy suit one another and are the easiest for a modern audience to accept. Hector and Lizzy easily become a political couple, with a combination of social cachet, solid finances and love. The adaptation displays this in several ways. After their marriage, as they view the large mansion they have just purchased (formerly home to a member of the aristocracy) Hector asks why she chose to marry him. Lizzy coyly replies "has it never occurred to you that I married you for your money?" but then explains she never cared for Seadown and "besides, I like my own way, I hope you've noticed," something Lizzy would never have obtained had she married into the nobility, as we see Virginia, Conchita and even Nan all subject to the rule of their husband's family. Unlike the other husbands, Hector appears to have married Lizzy for her playful qualities and lack of dissimulation, and they appear genuinely in love. The idea that

Hector and Lizzy are a 'modern' love match is emphasized even further in the scene where we see them breakfasting in bed together (no separate bedrooms here), as their two babies are brought in by nursemaids. While Virginia's and Conchita's children are looked after entirely by maids, Hector and Lizzy are shown to have distinctly contemporary ideas about spending time with their children and each other. It cannot be unintentional that in the adaptation, the most modern couple are the most successful financially and socially, though the novel offers this insight as well:

> But his [Hector's] chief reason for feeling safe was that her standard of values was identical with his own. Strangely enough, this lovely alien who had been swept into his life on a brief gust of passion, proved to have a respect as profound as his for the concrete realities, and his sturdy unawareness of everything which could not be expressed in terms of bank-accounts or political and social expediency (Wharton 1994: 315-316)

Lizzy, as Conchita tells us early in the second half of the adaptation "was never that impressed by a title" and it seems that in following her desire, she has also more than met the demands of her wallet.

Violations in decorum and increasing social mobility: the rise of the middle class and the erosion of inherited wealth in the adaptation of *The Buccaneers*

Like *Pride & Prejudice*, *The Buccaneers* does have a romantic ending, but not quite in the way one might imagine. Nan runs off to South Africa with the handsome aristocratic politician and civil engineer Guy Thwarte (played by Greg Wise, who went on to play Marianne Dashwood's handsome suitor Willoughby in the adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility*). Nan and Guy first meet at his estate, the (slightly cloyingly) titled Honourslove. Guy's father, Sir Helmsley is an old rake and art collector who eventually takes a shine to Nan's governess Laura. Guy and Nan are taken with one another on first meeting. Similar to Elizabeth and Darcy's meeting at Pemberley, this meeting takes place in the grounds of the Thwarte estate, "the most beautiful place in England." (Wharton 1994: 114 and TV) Guy shows Nan the house and grounds in the

golden late afternoon light, "the magic hour" (Wharton 1994: 114 and TV) as he describes it, as he talks about his deep love of his house and its grounds.

> Guy: I don't know. I suppose if one were married to a woman one adored one would soon get beyond her beauty. That's the way I feel about Honourslove.
> Nan: Then you understand!
> Guy: Understand?
> Nan: I mean about the beyondness of things. I know there's no such word.
> Guy: No, but there is such a feeling. (Wharton 1994: 114 and TV)

This idea of 'beyondness' is reminiscent of both Lawrence Selden's republic of the spirit in *The House of Mirth* and Newland Archer's desire to escape with Ellen to "a world where…we shall simply be two beings who love each other" (Wharton 1986: 290) in *The Age of Innocence.* In the latter two stories, these are ideals, places or states that are never achieved but touchingly in *The Buccaneers*, the lovers achieve their ideal.

A few months after their introduction, and shortly after Virginia's wedding, Guy announces he is going to South America as an engineer to earn money to go into politics. The adaptation sets this announcement during a visit to Honourslove that Nan has arranged so that Laura may see Sir Helmsley's Rossetti painting. Both Guy and Nan are uncomfortable at his announcement and it slowly emerges that Guy considers Nan too young to marry, while Nan draws the comparison of her mother, married at eighteen, who grew up during her marriage. Neither can bring themselves to say what they truly feel and during Guy's two year absence, Nan is successfully courted by Julius, Duke of Trevennick.

Nan and Guy meet for the first time since his return from South America at her Christmas party at Longlands, during a kind of demure conga line that winds through the house, led by the ever playful Conchita. Nan tires, and goes into her boudoir, the aforementioned Correggio room to rest. Guy follows her and they proceed to admire the Correggios. Nan immediately begins telling him how she spends much of her time

gazing at the paintings. In the adaptation, she narrates the three depictions of Leda that appear in Correggio's *Leda and the Swan*: Leda as a young girl being wooed, the seduction, and Leda dressing as the swan flies away. In a momentary echo of her girlish self, Nan says of the Correggios "maybe one day, if I'm patient I'll tame them and they'll come down to me." (Wharton 1994: 236 and TV) As she says these words, *Venus with Mercury and Cupid (The School of Love)* is partially visible behind her in this shot. Guy suggests that the Correggios should be hung alone, and Nan confesses that she has tried to remove the other paintings that surround them "these charming family momentos" as Guy wryly calls them, but that her mother-in-law the Dowager simply had them put back up. This scene establishes that Nan and Guy's tastes are still in accordance with another, even after two years apart and the change in Nan's social and marital status. The partial visiblility of *The School of Love* indicates this scene as the beginning of Nan and Guy's affair. When Guy tries to admonish her for not asserting herself in her new social rank Nan pleads "please don't pat me on the head and send me back to the nursery" (Wharton 1994: 238 and TV) pushing her hand over his mouth, which he seizes and kisses. Nan quickly withdraws her hand and requests a cigarette, and the sexual tension is transferred much in the way it is in the smoking scenes between Lily and Selden in the opening sequences of *The House of Mirth,* where cigarettes act as a kind of barely acceptable social barrier.

While this scene of Guy and Nan in the Correggio room appears in both the novel and the adaptation, it is put to slightly different narrative use in each case. As I have stated, the adaptation uses this scene, with its insinuation of *The School of Love* in the background, and with the addition of Guy feverishly kissing Nan's hand, as the beginning of their affair. In the novel, this scene and Conchita's loan are woven into one dreadful rumour circulated by Idina:

> Yes, an American. But they behave so oddly. Like pirates. You know the Duchess of Tintagel, who's one of them, squeezed eight hundred pounds out of the poor Duke. She *said* it was for someone who was being blackmailed on account of her, but everyone knows it was *she* who was being blackmailed. It seems she'd had someone in her bedroom on Christmas Eve: Sir Helmsley Thwarte's son, Guy. (Wharton 1994: 334)

In the novel, Idina's words precipitate the social downfall of Nan and Guy in England. As a titled aristocrat, Idina is determined to use her social influence to expel the younger buccaneers, whom she correctly identifies as her rivals. In the novel, Idina consolidates the rumour that Nan and Guy are having an affair long before they give voice to their feelings, in much the same way that Newland and Ellen are believed to having an affair in *Age.* This divergence represents several key character shifts between the novel and the adaptation. In the adaptation, Idina has a much lower social and financial position than Nan, and her rivalry is primarily with Virginia. By separating the key narrative elements of Idina's jealousy of the younger women and the five hundred pound loan, the adaptation makes greater use of these two elements to build intrigue. Rather than a loan for nothing in particular, the five hundred pounds provides Conchita with an abortion and reveals Julius's attitude towards sex and the economy of exchange. Rather than having Idina direct her bile at all the buccaneers in general, she becomes increasingly sympathetic when Seadown abandons her and acts as a foil to Virginia's coldness.

After their highly charged meeting under the Correggios, Nan and Guy begin to meet in London while Nan is staying with Lizzie and Hector, even visiting him at the House of Commons. When Julius begs Nan to return home and she reluctantly agrees, Guy accuses her of being afraid to pursue their love, and they part. Nan, though no longer subject to Julius's terrifying advances, is increasingly unhappy in her marriage. When Nan leaves Julius for good, the adaptation shows her and Guy literally running off together in the middle of a party on the lawn at Allfriars. They run off in public, in

front of hundreds of witnesses, into a carriage and drive into the country, where they stop by the side of the road and he carries her into a field of grain. There is a long shot that takes in the clear blue sky, the golden field, and small dusty road. This scene could be construed as an echo of the sudden embrace in the barley field in *A Room with a View*, but it can also be traced back to Nan's earliest impressions of England. When Nan is first under Laura's tutelage she is introduced to Alfred Tennyson's poem *The Lady of Shalott* which begins with the lines "on either side the river lie/ long fields of barley and of rye/ that clothe the wold and meet the sky;/ and thro' the field the road runs by" (l.1-4) Nan loves this poem, and this scene of the fulfillment of her romantic desires and the romantic expectations of the television audience must be seen as a homage to these lines of Tennyson. In the novel, the poems that Nan enjoys are Rossetti poems, in keeping with the unspecified Thwarte Rossetti painting and Laura's Italian heritage. Like the paintings that influence the mise-en-scene or appear directly in the adaptation, the Tennyson poem has been used to great effect here, both as a recognizable English poet whose work shapes the young American protagonist's first impressions of the old country, and as inspiration for the visual representation of the same protagonist's romantic fulfillment.

Even though Guy and Nan do run away together amidst scandal, it is made clear to the viewer that their social position has shifted from that of the aristocracy to the upper middle class. Guy will leave behind his beloved estate and political career, and Nan will leave behind her title and social position, along with the scandal of their elopement. Their plan is to travel to South Africa where Guy will work as a civil engineer, a profession we would now associate with a stable high income. Rather than simply ending with the reunion of the lovers, the adaptation of *The Buccaneers* is a romance with the practicalities explained. This unexpected shift downwards in social position for the lovers is in keeping with the adaptation's portrayal of the successful,

modern couple, exemplified by Hector and Lizzie, and provides a contrast to the beginning of the narrative which concerns itself with the upward mobility initially desired by the four buccaneers.

In addition to this representation of the modern couple, there is also a contemporary representation of the older single woman. Like Ellen Olenska, Laura Testvalley is a woman of a certain age with a well-concealed but nonetheless exciting past. As Nan's governess she is the epitome of English propriety and she does guide all her buccaneers into society and marriage. Early in the adaptation, Nan expresses a desire "to be free, like you" and Laura quickly explains that freedom for a woman has "a price." It is only at the very end that we learn the price of Laura's freedom: an absence of love. Laura is not without her adventurous side, as we learn she once had an affair with Lord Richard when she was governess to his sisters. Later, when Nan arranges for Laura to meet Sir Helmsley, their shared taste is displayed in a mutual appreciation of his Rossetti painting, mirroring Nan and Guy's meeting under the Correggios. Described in the novel only as "the little Rossetti Madonna" (Wharton 1994: 289), the adaptation shows us *The Beloved* (1865) (Figure 31) a classic Pre-Raphealite image of a sumptuous red-head in a green cloak surrounded by flowers, and attendants. In the adaptation it is in front of the Rossetti that Laura reveals her own expatriate heritage as an Italian exile: her un-anglicized name, Laura Testavaglia, and her family's friendship with Rossetti. In the novel, Laura is Rossetti's cousin and it is this aspect that initially draws the art collecting Sir Helmsley to her. In the adaptation, it is her appreciation of his taste in art and their corresponding ages that draw them together. After years of young mistresses, the widowed Sir Helmsley seems ready for the more mature Laura. Laura, after years of "finishing young ladies whom nature has hardly begun" is hoping for love and comfort, desires the adaptation represents with Sir Helmsley's gift of a large cashmere shawl. Out of all the characters in *The Buccaneers*,

Laura makes one of the most painful exchanges. She exchanges her chance for love with Sir Helmsley for Nan and Guy's escape. After Nan and Guy elope from the party at Allfriars, Sir Helmsley blames Laura for this turn of events and breaks with her. The last we see of Laura is her and Jackie in their nightgowns in Jackie's house as Laura resigns herself to her fate: "I've earned my own living since I was seventeen and I've lived without love for forty years, I shall certainly continue for another forty." As a member of a lower class, Laura is not permitted the freedom exercised by Ellen Olenska, but nor is she subject to the fate of Lily Bart.

The Buccaneers deals almost constantly with anxieties around social mobility and breaches in decorum. The most consistent source of social error and audacity is certainly Conchita. From her louche South American upbringing, to her extramarital affairs, to her style of dancing, dressing and singing that continues to entertain and shock throughout, she is certainly always a source of vague anxiety to her friends and relations. However, she is also the most loyal friend, as she is the only one who continues to speak to Nan after her romance with Guy has become public knowledge. In the adaptation, Nan brings flowers to Lord Brightlingsea's funeral and as her carriage stops beside the cortege, Virginia and Lizzie snub her and look the other way. Conchita leaps out of her own landau and rushes over to Nan crying "I'm sure everything you ever thought of me was true and worse, but I never desert a friend!"

The rumoured affair and then elopement of Nan and Guy is the other incident that represents a breach of decorum. In the novel, it is Idina who spreads gossip about Nan and Guy, maliciously combining two separate rumours into one, as previously discussed. In the adaptation it is simply Nan and Guy being seen together publicly in London, particularly at the House of Commons, along with Nan's lengthy absence from her husband's house that sets tongues wagging. When they finally run off together, their

elopement is reported in the press, ensuring unwanted scandal and publicity for the couple and their families, much in the style of Austen adaptation elopement scandals, like Lydia and Wickham in *Pride & hPrejudice*, or Maria and Crawford in *Mansfield Park.*

There is also a curious political debate that takes place near the end of the adaptation. There is no hint of it in the novel. As Julius, Guy and Hector are all politicians it is plausible that scenes of political debate like this would figure, but it also acts as a reflection of the contemporary political climate in Britain. Guy, a member of the aristocracy, puts forth a motion to abolish the House of Lords. His main objection seems to be that many aristocrats have no profession and do no work in exchange for their income. This provides yet another sharp contrast between the British social system and the trade-based fortunes of the American heiresses. In this debate, old guard conservatism is represented by Julius, while Guy is a thinly veiled 'new labour' and Hector comes somewhere in between.[18] By this point in the adaptation, Julius and Guy are not only political rivals, they are also rivals for Nan's affections. They even come to blows in an argument that begins with national politics and ends with sexual ones. This scene is a cleverly inserted comment on contemporary attitudes towards social mobility, although for an adaptation already laden with multiple plot lines it is almost excessive. Nonetheless, Guy's motion to abolish the House of Lords comes to parliament the day after his affair with Nan has become public knowledge, and although he boldly appears in the house and makes his argument, his personal errors in decorum have effectively sounded his death knell in politics.

The fashion and cultural historian James Laver comments on the American women who entered the British aristocracy in his work *The Age of Optimism: Manners*

[18] Earlier in the adaptation, Hector is identified as a 'Tory Democrat', a position so middle of the road that even Lord Brightlingsea disapproves of it.

and Morals 1848-1914: "Even those who were not millionairesses but had a sufficiency of the world's goods joined in this gold rush in reverse and all Europe was subject to the impact of 'Momma and the Girls.'" (1966: 214) *The Buccaneers* is the fictional account of this impact, mainly from the perspective of the American women, but with some indication of what the aristocratic families they became part of must have felt. The adaptation also resonates with the contemporary viewer, as many of the fears and anxieties its protagonists experience are the consequence of an increasingly mobile capitalist society. Like the other novels and adaptations under discussion here, *The Buccaneers* leads us to think not only about issues of nationality and citizenship, but also the notion of the exile, the immigrant and the expatriate. Even though nationality is rarely explicitly discussed in these adaptations, it is clearly an underlying source of tension.

Nationality and Heritage: "tired of trying to be English"

In *The Buccaneers,* there are several key scenes in which errors in social decorum are related to issues of nationality. When Nan and Guy admire the Correggios away from the other guests, she is later reprimanded by her mother-in-law with the following comparison, that "duchesses are like soldiers" (Wharton 1994: 243 and TV) implying that Nan's ignorance of her mistake is related to her being American. Nan then confesses "I'm tired of trying to be English" (Wharton 1994: 244 and TV) but is calmly assured "My dear, you are English. When you married my son you acquired his nationality."(Wharton 1994: 244 and TV) Yet it is evident that her mother-in-law and her husband are both continuously frustrated with Nan for her failure to be sufficiently English. When Nan first arrives at Longlands after her honeymoon, there is a memorable point-of-view shot: Nan gazes all the way up to the hall's huge domed ceiling as her mother-in-law the Dowager Duchess tells her about her duties, "the supervision, together with the financing of everything pertaining to the house." The

distance of this shot, combined with the Dowager's crisp voice-over effectively convey the weight of Nan's new responsibilities, which includes learning to be less American.

Another scene where nationality and heritage come into play is at the breakfast table of Allfriars. Virginia's husband Lord Seadown, reads out from the newspaper that Hector Robinson MP has purchased a former aristocrat's London mansion. Seadown then acidly comments "it takes about eight hundred years to become one of us, you can't buy your way in" at which point the American Virginia silently rises and leaves the table, amid awkward glances from her sisters in law, while Seadown looks vaguely smug. Characteristically in this scene, the couple who hardly speak to each other manage to wordlessly express their displeasure. Their glances effectively convey Virginia's offence and haughtiness, and Seadown's feeling that despite the social rank conveyed on Virginia by their marriage, he will never consider her to be part of his world. This scene is followed by a shot of Lizzy practically galloping up the grand staircase of said mansion into Hector's arms as she expresses her delight with the property. Hector's penchant for the grand is later explained in a conversation between him and Col. St. George. When the colonel advises Hector to get rid of the aristocracy, Hector explains "we don't want to cut off the heads of our nobility, we want to join them at table." He then asserts that the only reason Americans court the English nobility is "because you like their style." This brief but important exchange between Hector and Col. St. George serves as a comment on the continuing contemporary fascination with the English royal family.

On another occasion, Lord Brightlingsea takes Hector to task with the question as to "why the Tory party has betrayed us?" Hector appears visibly uncomfortable and can offer no explanation, so Lord Brightlingsea angrily goes on to say that "very soon, the aristocracy will be extinct and our great houses will litter the countryside like the

bones of dinosaurs." Although the aristocracy is not extinct at present, there are certainly enough derelict Grade A listed buildings throughout the United Kingdom these days. Television shows like *Restoration* remind us of this, and even property shows such as *Location, Location, Location* demonstrate an upper middle class desire for listed properties that would have once belonged to the landed gentry, confirming that we still 'like their style.' Even the 2005 ban on hunting with hounds, traditionally a recreation of the aristocracy, can be seen as another sign of this decline of the nobility, or certainly its shifting status. Like Guy's political motion to abolish the House of Lords, these scenes that appear only in the adaptation are timely comments on current attitudes towards social mobility and in keeping with the increasing influence of the televisual in classic novel adaptations on television.

The Buccaneers comments further on shifting ideas of nationality through the character of Laura. Although she functions as the buccaneers' guide to the inner-workings of English society—another hieroglyphic world—she is in fact the daughter of Italian exiles: "Miss Testvalley, who is staying on with the family though both girls are out and on the brink of marriage, and who is apparently their guide in the world of fashion—odd as such a role seems for an Italian revolutionary." (Wharton 1994: 193) The adaptation introduces Laura's background in a scene where she admires Sir Helmsley's Rossetti painting, *The Beloved.* Laura's European background has equipped her "with a very strong sense of fellow feeling for outsiders," and Sir Helmsley connects this to her "loyalty to this little band of American exiles." The choice of words here is very interesting: outsider versus exile. To be an outsider implies being in society, but not necessarily of it. To be an exile implies a longing for a homeland to which one may someday return. Laura considers herself and the buccaneers outsiders, people who might one day be accepted in the society they have chosen to inhabit. Sir Helmsley uses the word exile, an echo of the innocuously posed question "when do you plan to return

home?" or the more acutely xenophobic "go back to your own country." Sir Helmsley comments further "I almost envy you Miss Testvalley, the freedom of the outsider, as you put it, is no doubt tough but real." To which Laura replies "Oh no, you're quite wrong. No, outsiders have even less freedom. Well, one false move, particularly as a woman, and one is consigned to oblivion." Although these words do not appear in the novel, they are certainly in the spirit of Wharton's work, as this is precisely what happens to Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth.* In *The Age of Innocence,* Ellen must leave New York to escape further social scrutiny or possibly outright scandal, just as Nan and Guy must flee to South Africa to begin their life together. Other Wharton heroines are also confined to their own form of social oblivion: Charlotte Lovell secretly bears an illegitimate child and transforms herself into *The Old Maid*, Undine Spragg in *The Custom of the Country* racks up lovers and divorces, and Mattie Silver in *Ethan Frome* becomes an invalid.

In much of Wharton's work the heroines are outsiders regardless of where they were born or where they have lived. Many of them become outsiders in the society they were born into, or as with *The Buccaneers*, they begin as outsiders and it takes years before they are even a little accepted. It is Guy who puts what he classes as this English reluctance into words: "The English are not an easy people to adapt to, we're a tight little island and we hate change. When you ask us why we do things the way we do, we reply because that's the way we've always done them. But then suddenly we give in, without even arguing." The novel also has Guy expressing the same idea: "We're built like that in this tight little island. We fight like tigers against change, and then one fine day accept it without even arguing." (Wharton 1994: 237) These scenes that address both historical and contemporary ideas of nationality are reflected in Andrew Higson's comments on the adaptation of E.M. Forster's *Howard's End*:

> Forster's narrative might also be said to interrogate rather than to assume the nature of Englishness, not least in the Anglo-German cultural formation of the Schlegel sisters, the central protagonists of the drama. This sense of hybridity, and of a concomitantly fluid identity, is also emphasized in the cinematic presentation of the narrative, which is prefaced in the credits sequence by a Fauvist painting by the French artist Andre Derain and by a title card that uses Art Nouveau lettering. This situates the film not in relation to parochial national tradition, but in the context of European modernism and international art connoisseurship. (Higson 2000: 37)

The Buccaneers also attempts to interrogate contemporary ideas of Englishness and Americaness within a historical context. The era in which *The Buccaneers* is set predates that of *Howard's End* denoting a time when notions of national hybridity were more problematic, but also emphasizing that even now ideas of a hybrid national identity, whether British-European or for example North American-European, provoke anxiety and even hostility.

Art and Dress: Tissot dresses, Correggio boudoirs and art appreciation in *The Buccaneers*

Like the other adaptations discussed here, *The Buccaneers* represents wealth via an economy of symbolic objects, particularly art, dress and houses. The adaptation shows us the previously discussed Trevennick Correggios and the Thwarte Rossetti. It alludes to the Brightlingsea Reubens, ("which one is the Reubens?" asks Seadown) and a Titian once owned by the Thwartes. Throughout this cycle of six adaptations, we see art that represents immense wealth, but also taste and social critique. In *The Buccaneers,* the three Correggios are agreed to be magnificent, yet they are surrounded by "touching family momentos" and hung in the duchess's private sitting room. In the context of the narrative, the way in which these paintings are displayed signifies their lack of special value for the Trevennick family. They are not hung alone, or displayed where guests can admire and appreciate them. Only Nan is gifted with the ability to engage in appreciating the Correggios as masterpieces, and as images whose

significance becomes interwoven with her own life. As viewers, we are encouraged to identify with Nan's perspective, treating the Correggios as images of revelation and pleasure. Nan's rather personal relationship to the Correggios can be contrasted with Guy and Sir Helmsley's collection at Honourslove. Both are connoisseurs, as the adaptation indicates with a scene of passionate argument over the sale of an unseen Titian. The Brightlingseas are in an entirely different position. When Conchita says Nan and Virginia would "love to see the Reubens" at Allfriars, Seadown merely asks "which one is the Reubens?" indicating a general indifference to symbolic objects whose value cannot be recuperated in the form of currency. When Virginia suggests to Seadown on their wedding day "if you need money why don't you sell some of the paintings you never look at," Seadown explains: "Because my great grandfather who disliked and distrusted his children, quite rightly as it turned out, placed all the Brightlingsea treasures in trust. If the floor of this ball room were paved in gold I shouldn't be able to dispose of an ounce of it." Interestingly, it is only the Americans, Laura, and aristocrats eager for change like Guy, that are seen to appreciate the art that appears in the adaptation. Outsiders it would seem, either revere or reject the past. We might be fascinated by Europe, but find certain social customs ridiculous, as Isabel remarks in the adaptation of *The Portrait of a Lady* "is nothing proper here?"

Colour and dress are also employed in interesting, symbolic ways in *The Buccaneers*. Many of the dress styles and colours worn by the four young women derive from the paintings of James Tissot, a painter who specialized in social scenes, favouring images of attractive young women in fashionable clothes. As *The Buccaneers* opens, the girls all wear white or pale coloured dresses with a deeply coloured sash, often blue or yellow. This follows a similar fashion later worn by Conchita: a white dress with ruching and coloured bows down the front ("these tight dresses with the gathers up the middle of the front" (Wharton 1994: 234)) a style that can be seen in a Tissot painting

from 1878 known as *Seaside* or *July*. (Figure 26) In terms of physical appearance, Virginia is blonde and blue eyed in both the novel and the adaptation, the acknowledged beauty but also "golden and divinely dull." Vain and cold, she knows how best to deploy her physical assets. She appears in various shades of blue throughout the adaptation, and on her wedding day, her bridal headdress and bouquet contains small blue flowers that set off her mother's gift of the sapphire necklace and earrings. Virginia's bridesmaids sport dresses clearly taken from another painting by Tissot, *The Bridesmaid* (1883-85), which depicts this same shade of blue and style of dress. (Figure 30) Like Virginia, elements of Lizzy's physical appearance are common to both the novel and the adaptation. Described as dark haired and stylish, Lizzie's style is on greatest display when she boldly arrives alone at the summer cottage to join her friends wearing a striking the black and white striped dress, exactly like that sported by a young woman in Tissot's *Boarding the Yacht* (1873) (Figure 25) Laura is described early on as "a small brown governess" (Wharton 1994: 48) a description that is carried through in her costuming in the adaptation, where she appears frequently in brown or other sedate colours like plum and grey. The only time she breaks from this somber palette is when she and Sir Helmsley begin their brief affair. When Guy sees Laura at Honourslove, she wears a richly patterned cashmere shawl given to her by Sir Helmsley and a brilliant blue dress, creating a parallel between this gown and Ellen Olenska's blue Josephine dress in the film of *The Age of Innocence*.

Nan's passage from girlhood to womanhood is cleverly conveyed by her dresses and hairstyle, a technique shared by the adaptation of *The Portrait of a Lady*'s depiction of Isabel Archer before and after her marriage. At the beginning of *The Buccaneers*, Nan seems too short and voluptuous for her shorter dresses, evidence that she is literally beginning to outgrow her role as younger sister, despite Virginia's taunt that "anyone could see you're nothing but a baby!" Her hair is worn loose and Laura is often

admonishing her to take more care with her person. Nan's married persona is signified by a matronly upswept hairstyle, and drab, earth-toned dresses, for which Conchita reproaches her by telling her to get "a nice, young French maid." Nan's maturity is also reflected in her dress. As she grows older and adjusts more comfortably to her role as a duchess, she begins to wear dress styles that suit her frame, with a fitted waist and fuller skirt, as well as carrying off large ancestral jewels and feathered headdresses. She begins to wear more dramatic colours like dark red and green, and even coquettish cream and pink, with a black velvet ribbon at her throat.

Conchita always appears in the most daring dresses, in accordance with her social persona. Where other women sport sleeves and a modest neckline, her evening dresses are sleeveless and plunging. Her hair is usually upswept, but always with a trailing curl or tendril. Even her black mourning gown at the death of Lord Brightlingsea has an elegant ruffled sleeve. There are always elements of the flirt about her clothing, echoes of an earlier more whimsical self. Conchita never becomes matronly in her dress, whereas Virginia and Lizzie take on distinctly middle-aged hats and headdresses after they have children. For Lizzie and Virginia, their post-maternity small lace caps and high necked dresses are a sign of respectability, whereas Conchita retains her coquettish appeal with ruffled skirts and low-necked bodices.

The Buccaneers is also one of the few adaptations to contain a well fleshed out male character in the figure of Julius. The other men that appear—Lord Brightlingsea, Lord Seadown, Lord Richard, Colonel St. George, Hector Robinson, Sir Helmsley and Guy Thwarte—have much less screen time and consequently we learn less about them. Often, the female characters take precedence in this cycle of adaptations. This privileging of the woman's story in this cycle of adaptations may be due to a perception that costume dramas, whether for film or television, are watched by a predominantly

female audience, and that therefore women are only interested in the woman's part of these stories. While it would be impossible and indeed tedious, to produce entirely faithful, word-perfect film adaptations of the work of Henry James or Edith Wharton, I do lament that their male characters, with perhaps the exception of Newland Archer in *Age* and the much expanded character of Julius, lose some of their dimension on screen. Is this the fate of the sexes on screen I wonder? It seems that one must diminish while the other shines. For years, certain genres have relegated women to the role of delicate princess, helpless victim, or simpering helpmeet. Is this now the fate of men in the costume drama: nothing but shallow hunks in tight trousers reciting poetry? Is one's acting ability to be judged on whether one suits a cutaway jacket and sideburns? I fear this trend may be limiting for younger male actors, if not objectifying them in much the same way women have been. James Frain as Julius Trevennick and Daniel Day-Lewis as Newland Archer appear to have been fortunate in terms of their costume drama roles. John Malkovich as Gilbert Osmond and Nick Nolte as Adam Verver fare a little better, but then they are closer to middle age and they have their status as collectors to define them. Linus Roache as Merton Densher, Jeremy Northam as Prince Amerigo, Eric Stolz as Laurence Selden, and Greg Wise as Guy Thwarte are all excellent actors playing fascinating, complex characters but in the adaptations we get to know tantalizingly little about these men, apart from their attraction to the female protagonist.

As a television adaptation, *The Buccaneers* acknowledges Wharton as popular writer by incorporating inflections of contemporary social attitudes towards the role of women, the monarchy and the two traditional political parties in Britain. These comments on contemporary attitudes reinforce the adaptation's televisuality, but also represent a major divergence from the source text, something many adaptations whether on film or television are reluctant to do. This cycle of adaptations is marked by both innovative visual representations of textual description *and* shifts in character, setting

and plot that diverge from the source text for the sake of making a screen adaptation that is both gripping and timely. Rather than enacting the uncomplicated viewing pleasure of Davies's adaptation of *Pride & Prejudice*, *The Buccaneers* encourages its audience to speculate about something more than the outcome of courtship. Although it engages in the visual spectacle of dress so often attributed to costume drama, *The Buccaneers* demonstrates that this element can powerfully underscore the plot's complex social issues—Nan's voiceover that narrates us through Correggio's *Leda and the Swan* invites the viewer to engage in a Bourdieuian form of art appreciation, taking in the beauty of the image, the horrors of Nan's marriage and her longing for fulfillment and escape. Like the other five adaptations under discussion here, *The Buccaneers* provides narrative parallels between contemporary social anxieties and those of the characters. In addition to the political debate, there is also Julius's secret homosexuality, Conchita's unwanted pregnancy and Seadown's infidelity. The insertion of these issues into the basic narrative outlined by Wharton attempt to close the gap between the far off idea of heritage and the more inclusive definition of the past as "shared inheritance." (Goode 2003: 296)

Figure 14: The four buccaneers-Virginia, Lizzy, Nan and Conchita

Figure 15: Laura Testvalley

Figure 16: Virginia in her signature colour

Figure 17: Richard reveals his illness to Conchita; Conchita's sensual, fashionable dress

Figure 18: Virginia's wedding; Nan's Tissot inspired bridesmaid dress

Figure 19: Conchita confesses her troubles; Post-marital Nan styling of Nan and Conchita

Figure 20: Guy Thwarte motions to abolish the House of Lords

Figure 21: Nan and Julius, Duke and Duchess of Trevennick in their court dress

Figure 22: Sir Helmsley, Guy's father and Laura's suitor

Figure 23: Nan and Guy's Tennysonesque moment of romantic fulfilment

Figure 24: James Tissot's Young Woman in a Boat

Figure 25: James Tissot's Boarding the Yacht

Figure 26: Tissot's July: Specimen of a Portrait

Figure 27: Correggio's Leda and the Swan

Figure 28: Correggio's Danae

Figure 29: Correggio's Venus, Mercury and Cupid (The School of Love)

Figure 30: Tissot's The Bridesmaid

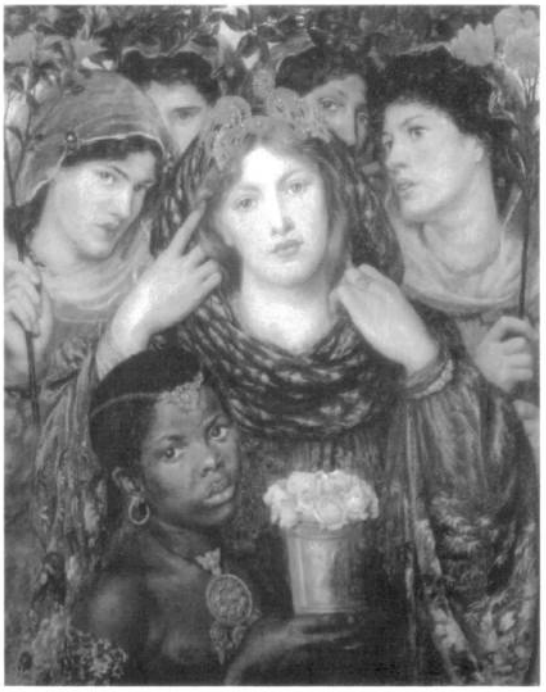

Figure 31: D.G. Rossetti's The Beloved

Chapter 4: The Portrait of A Lady

Writing about the film and the novel *The Portrait of a Lady* is an extremely daunting task. Not only are there two versions of the novel, the first as published in 1881, and the revised New York Edition of 1908, but the 1996 film adaptation directed by Jane Campion presents yet another strong interpretation of one of Henry James's most well-known works. In his essay "The New Isabel" Anthony J. Mazella establishes that the 1908 version of the novel presents key differences, especially with regard to Isabel's consciousness. In a later chapter on Wharton's *The House of Mirth*, I draw attention to Jerome Loving's speculations that the enhanced focus James brings to Isabel's thoughts in the 1908 edition, and what some feel is a greater focus on Isabel's fear of "a special kind of annihilation: that of the mind by the erotic, " (Mazella 1995: 601) was influenced by Wharton's heroine Lily Bart. It is Isabel's ambivalence towards sexual expression and erotic feeling that Campion foregrounds in her film, an issue also present in all Campion's past work including *The Piano* and her most recent film *In the Cut. The Portrait of a Lady* takes place in England and Italy during the 1870s, the same period covered by *The Age of Innocence* and *The Buccaneers*. Isabel Archer is brought to England by her aunt, Mrs. Touchett, and is greatly sought after. Her American suitor Caspar Goodwood follows her to England, only to be rejected. Lord Warburton is the next man to propose, but he too is turned away. Struck by his cousin Isabel's unusual demeanour, Ralph Touchett persuades his father to make over his inheritance to Isabel. When Isabel does inherit, she and Mrs. Touchett depart for Florence and her aunt's friend Mme. Merle introduces Isabel to Gilbert Osmond, a minor American collector who lives in Rome with his young daughter Pansy. Osmond pursues Isabel, and announces he is in love with her just as she departs on an extended trip to the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Isabel accepts Osmond to be her husband upon her return, despite the protestations of both Ralph and Caspar. Osmond soon begins treating

Isabel as yet another object in his collection, imposing his taste and will on every aspect of their lives. It is soon revealed that Isabel has been married for her fortune, and that her seduction was orchestrated by Mme. Merle, Osmond's former lover and Pansy's natural mother. Against Osmond's wishes, Isabel goes to Ralph's deathbed in England and is once again confronted by the persistent Caspar Goodwood.

Campion and the Jamesian reaction

Many 'Jamesians' (as James scholars call themselves) reacted strongly to Campion's film when it appeared. *The Henry James Review* devoted a special section in its Spring 1997 issue to the film: of the seven articles that appear in this section of the journal, none are overwhelmingly positive and most engage in some form of fidelity criticism. As these responses appeared in a journal that is on the whole devoted to Henry James's novels and stories, not plays, operas or other 'adaptations' of his work, perhaps this ignorance of the fidelity debate and a reluctance to move beyond it is understandable. If we are to take these responses as indicative of how the community of James scholars feels about Campion's adaptation, then it is clear that at the time, literary scholars were not keen to fully embrace other versions of 'The Master's' works. The recent edited collected, *Henry James goes to the Movies* is less overtly condemning, but still approaches film adaptations of James as inevitably flawed versions of the novel. While Jamesians are quick to point out the reasons why James's stories are so appealing for film and television adaptation, they also tend to view these adaptations as being fundamentally flawed by virtue of the different demands made on a story when it moves from one medium to another:

> Well it seems to me the plots are so good. The plots are melodramatic, really, and they're made for film. Of course, when they're stripped of being Jamesian, as in *The Portrait of a Lady,* then there's nothing left but melodrama and, in the case of that film, ideology. (Ozick, as quoted in Wachtel 1998: 318)

Ozick's comments are very telling here with regard to Campion's adaptation. Campion, out of all the directors of the films examined here, is probably the most pronounced in her ideology. Her past work, particularly *The Piano* (1993), has an auteurist stamp when it comes to telling the stories of difficult women and their struggles between intellect and passion. *The Piano* tells the story of Ada, a willfully mute Victorian mail order bride, who travels to New Zealand with her illegitimate daughter. Ada's daughter is already evidence of her struggle to contain her passions. The piano is her great outlet, the instrument that harnesses Ada's passions in a socially acceptable way. When she begins her affair with Baines, Ada acts on her physical desires. After her husband chops off her finger in punishment for her adultery, Ada escapes with Baines. Campion's most recent film *In the Cut* is the story of language teacher Frannie's involvement in a serial murder case. Scenes of teaching difficult students, of Frannie's cool mental detachment, are contrasted with the passionate sexual affair she enters into with a police detective. When a dismembered body is discovered in Frannie's garden, she begins an affair with the case detective; her sister is then murdered in the same way, and Frannie suspects her lover. She tries to trap him in her apartment and flee with his partner, who turns out to be the real murderer. Franny kills the murderer and escapes back to her flat. *The Piano* and *In the Cut* are stories of women who undergo ordeals as they are pulled in different directions by their intellect and their passion. But they are also women who survive their ordeal, they are never crushed by what happens to them. Campion's film of *The Portrait of a Lady* also shows us a woman who suffers and hints at her escape. *The Piano* has a happier ending, Ada has made a risky choice and though she has lost a finger, she has regained the use of her voice, in addition to a husband she truly loves. *In the Cut* and *The Portrait of a Lady* show us only that Frannie and Isabel have survived their ordeals, their escape from menacing forces is left purposely open-ended. The ending of *In the Cut* shows Frannie barefoot in a red halter-neck dress, wandering along

the highway as she returns from her brush with death, elegant and bloodstained. The red dress, which Frannie initially dons to seduce and trap her lover whom she believes to be the murderer, is transformed by her ordeal in the killer's lair into the red dress that signals a woman at the height of her power, much like Ellen Olenska's and Charlotte Stant's red gowns. But, as we will see with Lily Bart's scarlet dress, the symbol of the red dress cuts both ways. For Frannie, the open back of the halter-neck style and her bare feet convey her vulnerability, while the colour and the intact state of her dress after her escape connotes her strength. The final moments of the film show her moving through the garden of her apartment where the first victim was found. There is a strange air of triumph about these scenes, and the return to the garden—that is also a crime scene—underlines the fact that Frannie has transcended her potential role as victim, and in this context the juxtaposition of strength and vulnerability symbolized by the red dress becomes an evocation of power. At the end of *The Portrait of a Lady*, a black-clad Isabel runs away from Caspar and "his kiss… like white lightening" (James 1995: 489) through the garden, to the locked door of Gardencourt, looking all around her. We are left to wonder what will happen to Frannie and Isabel. In the case of *Portrait*, even James does not tell us what becomes of Isabel: does she return to Rome? If so, is it out of resignation, obligation to Pansy, or her social position? Will Caspar Goodwood win her over? Though Campion and her screenwriter have clearly chosen to foreground certain themes and moments in *Portrait* that form a continuum with the rest of her work, these are certainly not themes new to James, though they may be tackled visually in a way that is not always congenial to the literary establishment.

Campion's vision of Isabel's polyandrous desires: the *ménage-a-trois* fantasy sequence

Let us first deal with what is undoubtedly the film's most controversial scene: Isabel has just sent away her American suitor Caspar Goodwood from her London

hotel. She has told him she has no desire to marry, and as he takes leave of her, he brushes her face with his hand. As Isabel returns to her bedroom, she strokes her face where Caspar has touched her, and brushes her forehead against the bed canopy's fringe. As she lies on the bed, she imagines a *ménage à trois:* Caspar and Lord Warburton kiss and caress her as her invalid cousin Ralph looks on (Figure 34). Once Isabel meets Ralph's gaze, she seems to become a little embarrassed. Caspar and Warburton withdraw and then all three vanish into thin air. Most responses to this scene go something like this: "we see early in Campion's *Portrait*, when she has the vivid fantasy, lying on her bed, of being sexually groped simultaneously by Caspar Goodwood, Ralph Touchett, and Lord Warburton." (Nadel 1997:182) Or even "among those who know the book, the film is notorious for its deviations: the voices and images of modern Australian girls in a prologue, talking about love and kissing, or the three-in-a-bed sexual fantasy the heroine is given, at the end of which her suitors dematerialize *à la* 'Star Trek'." (Horne 2000: 41) I should mention that the response from Nadel is from the previously mentioned Spring edition of *The Henry James Review*, while Horne's is from a chapter in *Henry James on Stage and Screen*. In the same book in which Horne dismisses this particular scene, Micheal Anesko makes a remarkably obvious connection between James's text and the film's fantasy. The scene reads in James's words as follows:

> She stood still a moment, listening, and at last she heard Caspar Goodwood walk out of the sitting-room and close the door behind him. She stood still a little longer, and then, by an irresistible impulse, dropped to her knees before her bed and her face in her arms. She was not praying she was trembling—trembling all over. Vibration was easy for her, was in fact too constant with her, and she found herself now humming like a smitten harp. She only asked however, to put on the cover, to case herself again in brown holland, but she wished to resist her excitement, and the attitude of devotion, which she kept for some time, seemed to help her to be still. She intensely rejoiced that Caspar Goodwood was gone;…As she felt the glad relief she bowed her head a little lower; the sense was there, throbbing in her heart; it was part of her emotion, but it was a thing to be ashamed of—it was profane and out of place. It was not for some ten minutes that she rose from her knees and

> even when she came back to the sitting-room her tremor had not quite subsided. (James 1995: 217)[19]

As Anesko tells us, "on screen, Isabel's 'vibration' doesn't last for 10 minutes (rather 2:14), but what we see more than compensates for that compression. Making visually explicit what James reticently suggests, Campion's treatment of this scene is richly nuanced..." (2000: 181) Anesko's use of the term 'compression' for Campion's visual adaptation of this narrative moment from the novel, echoes a concept in the introduction to a 2002 special issue of *Screen* on adaptation and the literary film: "Processes of metaphor and condensation, the literal and figurative, pass back and forward...it is not simply stories but structures and syntax which are adapted." (2002: 2) Like the sequence of the falling coal in the novel and the film of Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*, an image both texts use to communicate the passing of time (*Screen* 2002: 1) (Figure 9), the fantasy sequence in *The Portrait of a Lady* is a remarkably bold interpretation of the textual source into a purely filmic event, as well as privileging Campion's treatment of a woman's sexuality. This scene illustrates the process of adaptation from novel to film, and how text can be transformed into film through "the passage from language to significance." (Barthes 1977: 65)

Like Sofley's *The Wings of the Dove* released only a year later in 1997, the film of *Portrait* has more sexual content than one has initially come to expect from costume dramas. We always seem to think of film adaptations of nineteenth and early twentieth century texts as being sexually repressed, if not free from depictions of sex altogether. Interestingly, it is usually the heritage cinema of Merchant Ivory's E.M. Forster adaptations that are held up as being the most prim (for a discussion of popular misconceptions about *Room* see Claire Monk's chapter in *Film/Literature/Heritage*), despite the homoerotic bathing scene in *A Room with a View*, the explicit homosexuality

[19] All references are to the 1908 text, which is also the text used for the film script.

of *Maurice,* the intersection of class and sex in *Howard's End*, and the May September relationship that appears in *Where Angels Fear to Tread.* The most recent Merchant Ivory film, which will be discussed in full in a later chapter, is an adaptation of James's *The Golden Bowl* and the passionate sexual affair at its heart is clearly on display. The influence of the popular television adaptations by Andrew Davies can be felt here as well. His 1995 adaptation of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* for the BBC, with its now legendary 'wet shirt' scene of Mr. Darcy (Colin Firth), as well as Davies's more recent adaptations of Anthony Trollope's *The Way We Live Now* and *He Knew He Was Right* have contributed to our changing perception of the place of sex in costume drama and literary adaptation. In his earliest discussions of the heritage film in "Representing the National Past" Andrew Higson remarks "all of these films arguably owe as much to the tradition of the BBC classic serial and the quality literary adaptation on television as they do to the filmed costume drama or to art-house cinema." (Higson 1993:111)

Though not as explicit as *Wings, Portrait* also suffered criticism for what was seen as its inclusion of sex where there was none before. The front cover of the January 1998 issue of *Sight and Sound* even dubbed these adaptations "The naked Henry James." While it is clear from even a cursory examination of Campion's past oeuvre that she has chosen women's stories, and that their sexuality is a crucial component in the narrative, choosing to focus on this aspect of *The Portrait of a Lady* in her adaptation is certainly not as great a fissure as some critics think.

Using the early avant-garde to display Jamesian ellipsis: the My Journey sequence

Following on from Isabel's fantasy is Campion's depiction of a travelogue sequence, which also incorporates Osmond's confession to Isabel before she goes travelling, "I'm absolutely in love with you." (James 1995: 360) The sequence begins with an oval title card "My Journey 1873" surrounded by shifting objects on a table.

There is a jerky shot of Isabel and Mme. Merle aboard a boat (Figure 40), followed by a close-up of Osmond's dark hand creeping across Isabel's white-clad waist and then a medium shot of Osmond embracing Isabel from behind. This is followed by another jerky, early cinema-style shot of some docks populated by men and women in traditional peasant dress as the women gather their trunks. The next shots show Isabel and Mme. Merle veiled in the desert, traveling by camel (Figure 41). Another close-up, this time of Osmond's mouth uttering the phrase "I'm absolutely in love with you" is followed by a shot of beans on Isabel's plate that have turned into mouths uttering the same phrase (Figure 42). A shot of the pyramids establishes the Egyptian location, and Isabel's voice joins in Osmond's refrain of 'I'm absolutely in love with you.' Still in the desert, Isabel is surrounded by begging children and staring into the distance. The next shot is of Osmond staring intently into the camera, overlaid with the black and white striped pattern of Isabel's parasol, but in this instance it becomes a hypnotic vortex reminiscent of Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. (Figure 43) This is overlaid by the image of a naked Isabel, shielding her face with her hands, being drawn into the vortex. (Figure 44) There is a close-up of Osmond's hand on Isabel's naked abdomen, and the sequence ends with an abrupt cut back to Isabel in the desert suddenly fainting with a whistling comic sound effect. Anesko calls this sequence "...a surrealist vehicle to disclose her [Isabel's] psychological entrapment." (2000: 185) Mark Eaton summarizes the visual style of the travelogue as follows:

> A bizarre montage sequence which mixes cinematic styles such as early twentieth-century newsreels and travelogues, the silent era Orientalist films featuring Rudolph Valentino, the surrealist films of Luis Buñuel, and the psycho-sexual suspense films of Hitchcock. (2000: 163)

Cynthia Ozick describes it as "a mimicry of silent film—travelling over the world on a camel, among the pyramids, and so on. That was so reductive and so foolish and so embarrassing." (Ozick in Wachtel 1998: 326) This sequence is again, another example of the adaptation's innovative compression of James. The travelogue sequence evokes

Isabel's erotic obsession and Osmond's dramatic pull. The strangeness of Isabel's emotions are conflated with the disorientation of travel and the exotic connotations of the East. The 'My Journey' sequence literally and figuratively conforms to Wharton's idea of the hieroglyphic world, where signs, gestures, looks and dress are made strange, but provoke the desire to decipher. In the novel, James sums up Isabel's travels with remarkable brevity, "Isabel came back to Florence, but only after several months; an interval sufficiently replete with incident." (1995: 370) What precisely comprises 'incident' in the book we never get to find out, other than the information that Isabel has visited France, Egypt, and Greece. This vagueness on the book's part is one reason why I am inclined to approve of Campion's travelogue sequence. Not only does the travelogue imply rather faithfully where Isabel has been, but it effectively summarises, without diminishing the emotional impact of her obsession, what has distracted her from gaining her 'general impression of life' so far, namely Osmond's single-minded pursuit and the effect of his confession. The shots of Isabel viewing the pyramids flow into the animated shot of beans turning into mouths, all of which utter Osmond's declaration "I'm absolutely in love with you." When Osmond tells Isabel this in the film, just before she is due to embark on her journey, they are standing in a catacomb encrusted with skulls. Isabel has separated from her friends to retrieve her parasol, which Osmond has found. The parasol itself is patterned with circular black stripes on a white ground, a pattern mirrored by the *Vertigo*-like image in the travelogue of the naked Isabel plunging into the same hypnotic, striped vortex. Interestingly, Nadel, the same critic who dismissed Campion's film in an earlier article, takes a more nuanced view of this sequence in his chapter in *Henry James goes to the Movies*:

> Osmond's interventions have put her hopelessly at sea, the shaky seaboard shots serving as a metaphor for her halted progress. More significant, the anachronistic styles of the insert represent the disruption of Isabel's progress as cinematic figure by changing the genre. As Isabel is about to become the articulate star of her own life, Osmond is beckoning her to a role in a home movie or silent film. *Campion's*

> *"portrait" thus substitutes film for painting*, delimiting Isabel's metaphoric portrait by the perspectives of the celluloid rather than the oil medium. (2002: 199 emphasis mine)

I am inclined to embrace the so-called liberties taken by Campion with *The Portrait of a Lady* because the film represents MacFarlane's notion of the translation or interpretation category of adaptation, a far more fruitful way of viewing the adaptation process. The fidelity debate can then be dispensed with, and we are free to view both text and film as related, but equal achievements in their own right. Another way in which *Portrait* sets itself apart as a film adaptation and a costume film is that, as Nadel's phrase suggests, *Portrait* does not employ a clear painterly influence as the other five adaptations do. Rather than allying itself with the style of a great classical artist, such as Terence Davies's use of John Singer Sargent in *The House of Mirth*, *Portrait*'s artistic framework is drawn from the history of film, a technique employed by few other period films. Scorsese's use of the iris effect in *The Age of Innocence* is a minor exception, and Merchant Ivory's use of two early cinema-style sequences in *The Golden Bowl* are generally viewed as inspired by Campion's sequence.

Art Images and Shifting Notions of Heritage in the adaptation of *The Portrait of a Lady*

I do not mean to diminish films that use painterly images—*The Wings of the Dove, The House of Mirth* and *The Buccaneers* all do this exquisitely—but *Portrait* represents a real challenge to the notion of how a 'heritage' film can look. *Portrait* demonstrates that one can have the sumptuous costumes of *Wings* and the beautiful historical locations of something like *Howard's End*, and also incorporate innovative imagery like the travelogue and the sexual fantasy. In *Portrait* the history of cinema and modern art is not divided from notions of heritage, and by including these techniques, *Portrait* represents a profound shift in the notion of the heritage film. Ian Goode explored this idea in *Screen* in relation to notions of British heritage. Quoting Raphael

Samuel, Goode introduces the notion of the past as "inheritance…that which the past has bequeathed to us," (2003: 296) implying that the past can include more than what is designated as worthy of preservation by the National Trust. Goode discusses this idea in relation to the work of broadcaster Alan Bennett, "Bennett's television documentaries explore how the past is experienced, how it is passed on, and the sentiments of inheritance." (2003: 298) A heritage film is no longer obligated to depict a Tourist Board version of anywhere, but is free to turn these characteristics of the classic literary adaptation on their heads: beautiful clothes that hamper the body (the ball scene in *Portrait* shows girls fainting from too much dancing in their tight corsets), splendid palaces that act as cages (both Pansy and Isabel are virtual prisoners at different points in their lovely homes—a state emphasized in the film by metal bars, bars of shadow, and imposing doorways that hem them in), and heroines torn between intellect and desire. Films such as Mira Nair's 2004 adaptation of William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair,* is a film that openly challenges rigid notions of heritage with its inflection of the narrative with a repertoire of Indian and Arab influences that permeate dress, setting, decoration, food, and music.

Campion's *Portrait* literally shows us the past in a different light. The often stark lighting, reminiscent of the phrase 'cold light of day' is contrasted with deep shadow. This use of light has been argued as gothic, particularly in the scenes of Isabel and Osmond's marriage in the Palazzo Roccanera. Considering James's description of the place, it is easy to see where the film's visual atmosphere and use of location takes its cue.

> A dark and massive structure overlooking a sunny *piazzetta* in the neighbourhoodof the Farnese Palace. …[A] palace by Roman measure, but a dungeon to poor Rosier's apprehensive mind. It seemed to him of evil omen that the young lady he wished to marry, and whose fastidious father he doubted of his ability to conciliate, should be immured in a kind of domestic fortress, a pile which bore a stern old Roman name, which smelt of historic deeds, of crime and craft and violence, which

> was mentioned in "Murray" and visited by tourists who looked, on a vague survey, disappointed and depressed, and which had frescoes by Caravaggio in the *piano nobile* and a row of mutilated statues and dusty urns in the wide, nobly arched loggia overhanging the damp court where a fountain gushed out of a mossy niche. (James 1995: 415)

The film's harsh use of light also de-emphasises colour, and rather than the brilliant hues of painterly films like *Wings* and *House*. *Portrait* takes on the flat tones of early photography and silent film, bringing together James's monochromatic dress descriptions and Campion's use of early film techniques. Even when colour is used, it tends to be washed out by bright daylight, or toned down by deep shadow. What remains is sometimes the texture of the fabric, the shimmer of red, blue and purple silk taffeta or the rich softness of brown and black velvet.

Sober and emotional black dresses in *Portrait*

As I mentioned, this colourlessness is in keeping with James's description of dress for Isabel, who begins the novel in black, still in mourning for her father. As Clair Hughes in *Henry James and the Art of Dress* remarks Campion "paid close and effective attention to James's dress references, using their colour and style to underscore the film's themes of suffocation, negation and entrapment." (2001: 46) This is especially evident when we look at the contrasting styles of Isabel's dress before and after her marriage to Osmond, a technique also deployed in *The Buccaneers* to indicate the pre and post-marital shifts in the character of Nan. When we are first introduced to Isabel in the film, she is dressed severely in a plain black gown with only a small white collar and a watch pendant. Her hair is light brown and wavy, and not quite straightened by her hairstyle that looks like two puffs of cloud (Figure 32). As the novel indicates, Isabel would still be in mourning for the death of her father at this time, and Hughes tells us "mourning for a parent in the 1870s required nine months in black, three months in half-mourning" (2001: 48) essentially an entire year of highly restricted dressing. When Isabel first visits Italy with her aunt, she wears cream and white dresses,

sometimes with demure floral patterns. This colour for dressing is not only in keeping with the custom of light coloured fabrics for warm climates, but also white as "the appropriate colour for the 'best' dresses of children and unmarried girls," (Hughes 52) a symbol of Isabel's increasingly nubile status due to her looks and fortune.

When we next see Isabel in Rome after she and Osmond have been married for some three years, "she [is] dressed in black velvet; she [looks] high and splendid." (James 1995: 418) In the film, Isabel wears an even more overwhelmingly black gown than her mourning dress. Though her gown for her Thursday 'at home'[20] is embroidered with gold thread and she wears elaborate gold earrings, the darkness of her dress is pervasive. James's description of Isabel in the novel shows her in black velvet "framed in the gilded doorway" (James 1995: 418) and though in the film the Palazzo Roccanera is deeply shadowed, this element of James's visual contrast of dark velvet and gilding is picked up in the costume design. In addition to the film's dark dress, Isabel's gloves are black, her hair is darker, and she wears it in a heavy, elaborately braided style reminiscent of Mme. Merle's (Figures 35 and 47). Hughes comments on this first appearance of the married Isabel in the novel:

> [T]his is 'emotional' black, black as 'a brilliant *coup de théâtre* in the ballroom', described by Hollander as a usage of the colour in the 'anti-fashion, rebellious tradition, which seeks to isolate and distinguish the wearer'. ...Isabel now stands framed in artificial light, at an evening party, in a palace of black stone, decorated by Caravaggio, master of night-scenes and violent dramas. (2001: 55)

This is Isabel at her most dramatic, but also her least natural. She is already deeply unhappy and is set to become more so. The cares of her marriage weigh her down as much as her large hairstyle and heavy dress. The relation between the encumbrances of

[20] Maureen Montgomery offers a description of this custom in her book *Displaying Women: Spectacles of Leisure in Edith Wharton's New York*: " Calling was one of the most important forms of social activity, it was never conducted casually. A particular time of day was set aside for visits and advertised to friends and acquaintances, a specific room was set aside for the reception of visitors, the hostess wore reception gowns designed specifically for these occasions and an elaborate code of etiquette governed interpersonal relations and behaviour. Little was left to chance." (76)

Isabel's emotional life and her dress are made explicit in the scene in the film where Osmond reprimands Isabel for failing to secure Lord Warburton's proposal to Pansy. As Isabel tries to leave the room, Osmond steps on the train of her dress, causing her to fall. Micheal Anesko comments on this scene "...once more her dress is her enemy: Osmond's overmastering foot pinions her flowing train and sends her sprawling to the floor." (2000: 185) At the end of film, as Ralph is dying, Isabel, away from Osmond's influence, resumes something of her old manner and her early hairstyle. This is most evident just after Ralph's funeral, when Campion repeats the setting of the opening shot of Isabel sitting on a tree branch, clad in black mourning, her hair ballooning slightly above her ears. Rather than summer, it is now winter, and the suitor who approaches is not Lord Warburton but the irrepressible Caspar Goodwood. The film's choice of a winter setting for this scene, with the contrast of Isabel's black mourning and untouched white snow, evokes James's descriptions of Caspar's 'white lightening' kiss and the black and white images he associates with Isabel throughout the novel. (Hughes 2001: 45) As he begs her to come away with him and kisses her with a passionate force, Isabel breaks free and runs toward the house. As she runs, Campion inserts a peculiar shot of the train of Isabel's dress billowing back and forth in the snow as she runs. Crucially, there is no one to trip her here, as James tells us "she had not known where to turn; but she knew now. There was a very straight path." (1995: 636) Isabel's train waves like a flag, and the open ending afforded by both novel and film, leads me to speculate that perhaps this is not a flag of freedom or even liberty, but choice. Pam Cook, in her review of *The Age of Innocence* also remarks on the cinematic use of May's train in the scene where she reveals her pregnancy to Newland: "she rises from her chair and towers over him, causing him to recoil. Scorsese films her gesture twice, the second time focusing on the bustle-encased lower half of her body and heightening the rustle of her skirt. It is a powerful image of male terror in the face of the maternal body." (Cook

2001: 163) The 'heightened rustle' of the skirt can almost be equated to a snake's rattle, revealing May as both deceptive and powerful, while Campion's careful depiction of Isabel's train as crippling or flowing indicates Isabel's varying degrees of personal freedom and strength at different narrative junctures.

Gilbert Osmond, John Malkovich and the Jamesian collector

Part of what burdens Isabel is her choice of husband, Gilbert Osmond, the "sterile dilletante" (James 396) in every sense. In the film, he is played by John Malkovich, a much lamented replacement for William Hurt. (Horne 2000: 42) "Reviewers almost universally objected to John Malkovich's one-dimensional portrayal of the character, which failed to convey his attraction as well as his corruption. Why would Isabel marry such a man?" (Wright Wexman 1997: 186) Isabel's reasons for marrying Osmond are complex, regardless of one's opinion of Malkovich's portrayal of Osmond, as both Campion's Osmond and James's Osmond are equally emotionally abusive towards Isabel in the end. When he forbids Isabel to visit the dying Ralph he tells her "I've an idea of what my wife should and should not do. She should not travel across Europe alone, in defiance of my deepest desire, to sit at the bed-side of other men." (James 1995: 583 and film) Bauer maintains "Campion's film doesn't make it clear why Osmond attracts Isabel, or why his taste alone would suffice to fulfill the 'requirements of her imagination.'" (1997: 195) To many Jamesians, it is not believable that Isabel would marry Osmond merely, as her aunt puts it in the film and the novel, "for the beauty of his opinions, or his autograph of Michelangelo." (James 1995: 325) Nor is Malkovich's performance sufficiently appealing for Jamesians to find it plausible that Isabel would marry Osmond because she is sexually fascinated with him. It is easy to postulate, from the position of educated experience that one would see through someone like Osmond. But, if you were an inexperienced girl, would you have the sense to see through his carefully managed façade? It is the same problem that faces Lily Bart.

Today's readers see Lily's mistakes as foolish and ignorant. How could she not see that Gus Trenor was dying to get her alone? How could she underestimate her rival Bertha Dorset? It is the same when Jamesians are offered Malkovich's Osmond: how could she be attracted to someone who is so clearly a monster? How could someone who seems as original and intelligent as Isabel commit this tremendous error in judgment and decorum so early on, in spite of guidance from her aunt and cousin? Lily and Isabel are both proud, too proud to admit their mistakes until it is too late. Isabel's misstep does not have quite the same effect as Lily's. While Lily is ostracized from the class she was born into, Isabel becomes separated from her early friendships, people like Henrietta, Ralph and Lord Warburton who tried to caution her about Osmond. Clair Hughes sums it up best: "He offers her an aesthetic of negation which she mistakes for unconventionality, sensitivity and intellectual freedom." (Hughes 2001: 54) It is clear also from the text of the novel that Isabel is greatly deceived by Osmond's manners. When she first visits his house James tells us "His kindness almost surprised our young friend, who wondered why he should take so much trouble for her." (James 1995: 313) As Isabel spends more time with Osmond, she becomes increasingly interested in him. She sees him as slightly eccentric, but also sensitive and a little shy. She is also charmed by Pansy, "she's such a dear little girl" (James 1995: 316) she tells Osmond on her first visit to his house in Florence, and when he asks Isabel to visit Pansy before departing on her travels, it is as if he has already secured her consent to marry. It is all very well to lament that William Hurt was unable to take the role of Osmond as originally planned, but this is much like wishing that a favourite edited passage were retained in a published novel's manuscript. It is an idea worth mentioning, but does not absolve one from offering a serious critique of the material that is actually there on the page or screen. Unfortunately, this is largely the case with critics' assessment of Malkovich's portrayal of Osmond.

James's initial description of Osmond is worth including here, especially when we compare it to Malkovich's portrayal and physical appearance:

> He was a man of forty, with a high but well-shaped head, on which the hair, still dense, but prematurely grizzled, had been cropped close. He had a fine, narrow, extremely modeled and composed face, of which the only fault was just this effect of its running a trifle too much to points; an appearance to which the shape of the beard contributed not a little. This beard, cut in the manner of the portraits of the sixteenth century and surmounted by a fair moustache, of which the ends had a romantic upward flourish, gave its wearer a foreign, traditionary look and suggested that he was a gentleman who studied style. His conscious, curious eyes, however, eyes at once vague and penetrating, intelligent and hard, expressive of the observer as well as of the dreamer. …He had a light, lean, rather languid looking figure, and was apparently neither tall nor short. He was dressed as a man dresses who takes little other trouble about it than to have no vulgar things. (James 1995: 280)

Reading this passage again I am struck not only by the emphasis on the pointed beard, (which suggests nothing so much as representations of the devil) but also by just how strongly Malkovich's previous role as Valmont in *Dangerous Liasons*, and his recent performance as Tom Ripley in *Ripley's Game* make him a logical choice to play Gilbert Osmond. Having played a womanizer, and most recently a sociopath, Malkovich not only looks like James's Osmond, but he has already dealt with all the necessary characteristics. His reputation for this type of role precedes him, perhaps to diminishing effect with critics and James scholars, but he brings the charm and menace of these roles to bear on Gilbert Osmond in a way this is both timely and appropriate to James.

Osmond's cold, manipulative personality derives from his role as a collector. Like Adam Verver in *The Golden Bowl*, his attitude towards collecting seems to affect every aspect of his life. Isabel observes "even Mr. Osmond's dimunitive daughter had a kind of finish that was not entirely artless" (James 1995: 306) and that Osmond "had consulted his taste in everything—his taste alone… that was what made him so different from everyone else…this appearance of thinking that life was a matter of connoisseurship." (James 1995: 312) Even though the descriptions we get of

Osmond's art collection in the novel are vague at best, his aesthetic, his abhorrence of vulgarity permeates all his relationships. Like Adam Verver's "passion for perfection at any price"(James 2001: 143) Osmond's banishment of vulgarity is analogous to his humourless, intolerant attitude towards what he sees as Isabel's "too many ideas" and Pansy's love for Edward Rosier. The film, like James's prose is shrouded, it glides over the surface of Osmond's collection of paintings, furniture, drawings, and objects:

> a variety of those faded hangings of damask and tapestry, those chests and cabinets of carved and time-polished oak, those angular specimens of pictorial art in frames as pedantically primitive, those perverse-looking relics of medieval brass and pottery, of which Italy has long been the not quite exhausted storehouse." (James 1995: 279)

The only item our gaze lingers on is the image of Pansy, the "little convent flower" (James 307) kept in an artificial state of innocence. In both the film and novel, when Mme. Merle compliments Osmond on the perfection of his room he sighs "I'm sick of my adorable taste." (James 1995: 293 and film) Bored of bibelots, Osmond has started collecting women: Mme. Merle is just one specimen in his collection—he tells her "when I have known and appreciated a woman such as you." (James 1995: 292 and film) Osmond's sister Countess Gemini is another: "She's rather unhappy and as she's not of a serious turn she doesn't tend to show it tragically: she shows it comically instead." (James 1995: 311 and film) Pansy is of course Osmond's ultimate achievement, having shape her to his will from birth. Osmond tired of Mme. Merle because she had too much ambition, for herself and him. Countess Gemini "to a casual view…revealed no depths" (James 1995: 305) and hence Osmond regards her as a harmless but irritating necessity in his household. As Osmond gets to know Isabel, this is how he begins to think of her:

> We know that he [Osmond] was fond of originals, of rarities, of the superior and the exquisite; and now that he has seen Lord Warburton, whom he thought a very fine example of his race and order, he perceived a new attraction in taking to himself a young lady who had qualified herself to figure in his collection of choice objects by declining so noble a hand. (James 1995: 354)

Osmond's interest in Isabel is couched in terms of a connoisseur appraising an item at auction, in much the same way Adam Verver settles simultaneously on a set of Turkish tiles and Charlotte Stant. Adeline Tintner in "The Museum World of Henry James" remarks "the man who worships art exclusively will, in adjusting people to his museum scale of values, destroy their freedom" (1963: 44) and this is just what we see Osmond doing to Isabel after their marriage. James Clifford's essay "On Collecting" gives some interesting insights into the image of the collector that can be applied to Osmond. Collections have their own internal hierarchy dictated exclusively by the collector, and Osmond, as well as James's other great collector figure, Adam Verver in *The Golden Bowl* tend to extend what C.B. Macpherson identifies as "possessive individualism" (as qtd. in Clifford 1993: 51) over their entire household. Adeline Tintner states this even more clearly: "The morality of the aesthetic life, if carried to its final conclusion, results in the death of the spirit and stasis of action." (1963: 144) Collectors, as embodied by Osmond and as we will see in a later chapter Verver, impose the relationships they have with objects onto the relationships they have with people, specifically the women they marry. Both Osmond and Verver acquire collections of art objects, and while Verver intends to create a public museum, Osmond's collection is entirely private. Adam puts Charlotte on display as the tour guide to his collection near the end of the adaptation, while Osmond constrains Isabel further, forbidding her to visit the dying Ralph. Bourdieu comments that museums and their collections are made up of "the relics inherited from a past which is not its own, …in which the chosen few come to nuture a faith in virtuosi while conformists and bogus devotees come and perform a class ritual." (1993: 236) The cinematic depiction of Osmond exposes him as a 'bogus devotee,' gliding over his collection without focusing on specific objects. Unlike the other adaptations depicted here, *Portrait* does not engage in the cinematic contemplation of a particular set of paintings, implying that Osmond's collection contains nothing of

symbolic or even financial value. Were Osmond to exhibit his collection in the manner of Adam Verver, Osmond would surely be exposed as a fraud and a dilletante. In the scene where he forbids Isabel to visit Ralph in England, the camera takes in his cluttered, dusty study, littered with his collection of objects. Sculpture, antique scientific instruments, etchings and paintings are all jumbled together, and while there may very well be an 'internal hierarchy' as Clifford suggests, it is not apparent on screen. What is apparent is Osmond's penchant for acquiring objects, and just as he has acquired Isabel, he is determined to keep all his objects where he can see them. In this same scene, a close-up shot reveals Osmond making a careful reproduction of a classical etching of a crest or coin, evoking his love of money and confirming his status as a 'bogus devotee' of both art and the figure of the artist. Earlier in the film, when Mme. Merle disdains his drawings, Osmond haughtily remarks "they really are so much better than other people's," reinforcing his status as a collector who is more interested in the idea of art appreciation as "class ritual." (Bourdieu 1993: 236) This is contrasted with Isabel's complimentary awe on her first visit to Osmond, where she remarks of his collection "everything seems to me beautiful and precious." Osmond's interest in art objects is depicted as an extension of his sadism in the adaptation, his urge to acquire is closely linked with his urge to control Isabel, as we see in the scene where he physically picks up Isabel like a doll and forcibly seats her on a couch.

As collectors Osmond and Adam have complete confidence in the superiority of their own taste in everything and regard virtually all social acquaintances as 'specimens' or types. Where Adam Verver has earned his fortune and then become a collector, Osmond is a collector even before he marries Isabel. His acquisitiveness extends to her entire world: her person, her fortune, her mind. The collector differs from the miser, though both are hoarders in their way. Osmond has a certain bohemian, shabby chicness before Isabel, a style the film communicates by having Osmond make

his first appearance dressed in pyjamas and dressing gown, surrounded by his collection. Although Osmond professes his life's desire to Isabel "to be as quiet as possible…to be content with little" (James 1995: 315 and film), what he really wants is to be rich enough to satisfy his every whim, as James has Ralph observe in the novel: "His [Osmond's] ambition was not to please the world, but to please himself by exciting the world's curiosity and then declining to satisfy it." (James 1995: 445) During his courtship of Isabel, Osmond's collection and Pansy act as a kind of currency with Isabel, as if he were slowly buying up her stock with each encounter. After their marriage, Osmond's access to real currency is secure, and he is free to focus all his attention on a wealthy suitor for Pansy and on expanding and refining his collection. Isabel herself no longer has as much value to him, and since in his mind he has already acquired her, his attitude towards her is that of a petulant master, impatient that the thing he owns is refusing to cooperate. Campion extends this sadistic tendency into the visual language of film in the sequence where Osmond slaps and trips Isabel.

It is interesting to note that both Osmond and Verver are socially reclusive before their second marriages. Society bores Osmond unless it will facilitate marrying Pansy to a wealthy aristocrat. In both the film and the novel, we see Osmond acting the host during an 'at home' but when Pansy goes to a ball only Isabel accompanies her. Verver, while sincerely attached to the society of his daughter Maggie even after her marriage, also displays a general aversion to large parties and prefers to remain at home with his art collection or at most the company of Maggie and his grandson. While Charlotte Stant in *The Golden Bowl* is a more obvious example of a trophy wife (she is young, beautiful and sociable), Isabel is also a trophy to Osmond not only for her wealth, but for the pleasure he takes in tormenting her by breaking down her early ideas about independence, originality and experience. Rather than traveling and becoming immersed in a world of knowledge and art, Isabel stays in one place after she marries

and becomes increasingly conventional, prompting her old friends and suitors to describe her as "utterly changed."

Osmond begins to feel increasingly acquisitive towards Isabel when they first meet, and it is then that he begins to court her in earnest. In the film this closing in on Isabel is reflected in an exchange between Osmond and Mme. Merle during the later stages of Isabel's courtship:

O: The girl's not disagreeable, she has only one fault
M: What's that?
O: Too many ideas
M: I warned you she was clever.
O: Fortunately they're all very bad ones
M: Why is that fortunate?
O: No loss if they must be sacrificed
M: You're unfathomable. I'm frightened of the abyss into which I've cast her
O: You can't draw back now, you're in too far
M: Very good, but you must do the rest yourself.

This conversation can also be found in James (1995: 335), and though the sequence of some of the dialogue is slightly different, the function and much of the wording is the same. This exchange is similar to Kate and Merton's conversation on *The Wings of the Dove* where, as Kate puts it, they cannot retreat from their plan because "we've told too many lies." (James 1997: 317) In *Wings* it is Merton, the male protagonist who is taken aback by Kate's calculating suggestion, whereas in *Portrait* it is Mme. Merle who is shocked by Osmond's callousness. Yet both Merton and Mme. Merle continue to be complicit in plots against the American heiresses, Milly and Isabel. The moral repugnance of these two characters is fleeting in the face of social and financial ambition.

Mme. Merle as heritage femme fatale

Mme. Merle shares a certain femme fatale image with Bertha Dorset in *The House of Mirth, The Wings of the Dove*'s Kate Croy and *The Golden Bowl*'s Charlotte

Stant. Unlike these other characters, who are called by their first names, we always seem to think of Mme Merle as Mme. Merle, even though Mrs. Touchett calls her by her first name, Serena. Mme. Merle, more than Kate, Bertha, or Charlotte, maintains her air of mystery, "she's too fond of mystery," said Mrs. Touchett; "that's her great fault." (James 1995: 227) Mme. Merle exercises the social freedom of the married woman, a freedom also exercised by Bertha Dorset in *The House of Mirth*, which I will turn to in a later chapter. Mme. Merle has successfully conducted an affair with Osmond and concealed the illegitimacy of their daughter Pansy, ensuring a certain quality of life for her child. It is somewhat unclear whether Mme. Merle is truly a widow, as people assume, since Ralph acidly remarks quite early on in the film and the novel "the husband of Mme. Merle would be likely to pass away." (James 1995: 230) This ambiguity about Mme. Merle's husband reminds us of Ellen Olenska's status at the end of *The Age of Innocence,* living apart from her husband in Paris, except Ellen has her financial independence from her grandmother and retains her title of Countess Olenska, while Mme. Merle tells Isabel during the first weeks of their friendship "what have I got? Neither husband, nor child, nor fortune, nor position, nor the traces of a beauty I never had." (James 1995: 251) It is interesting that Mme. Merle is such a figure of respectability considering her admission of things she lacks: property, husband, money. In *The Age of Innocence* Ellen Olenska is a figure of scandal because she admits all: she has separated from her husband, and is considering divorce. Mme. Merle, with her fondness for mystery, manages to keep all her violations of decorum hidden, or at least has managed to ensure they are rarely discussed. When Barbara Hershey who plays Serena Merle in the film speaks the aforementioned lines about what she lacks, it is hard to know whether Mme. Merle is just being self-effacing, since Hershey's striking looks and compelling performance exert such charm that we feel enfolded in Mme. Merle's friendship right along with Isabel. James describes her as having "a face that told of an

amplitude of nature and of quick and free motions and, though it had no regular beauty, was in the highest degree engaging and attaching." (James 1995: 228) It is this engaging quality and Mrs. Touchett's repeated praise of Mme. Merle as 'brilliant' and 'without fault' (James 1995: 246) that we associate with Mme. Merle, more than Hershey's looks.

Like Wharton's Bertha Dorset and Ellen Olenska, Mme. Merle makes use of some of the social freedoms of the married woman: she can travel more or less unaccompanied, and dress in a more distinctive way—Clair Hughes describes her as "an image that rests somewhere between a Madonna and a Magdalen"(2001: 61)—but has no marital fortune and is therefore left in much the same position as Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth,* a perpetual houseguest plying her talent and charm as a musician and companion in exchange for a place to stay. Alongside the numerous similarities between Mme. Merle and Wharton and James's other female characters discussed here, there are strong similarities between Laura Linney's performance as Bertha in the film of *The House of Mirth* and Hershey's as Serena Merle in *Portrait.* Linney as Bertha and Hershey as Serena are both highly charming, highly dangerous women. The performances are magnificently subtle, and the moments when they reveal their cruelty are quite chilling. Where Linney as Bertha uses the fairness of her looks to work against the stereotype of the dark haired vamp, making Bertha even more unsettling in terms of the dissonance between her conventional period exterior and her selfish, conniving interior, Hershey uses the overwhelming charm constantly attributed to Serena in the novel to gloss over her real motives. Hershey is at her most charismatic in the scene where we are first introduced to Mme. Merle. Isabel discovers her at Gardencourt, quietly playing Schubert, and when Isabel asks her to keep playing she responds with the utterly gracious phrase "if it will give you pleasure—delighted" (James 1995: 226)

and in the film this line is complemented by a shot of Isabel watching Serena with a fascinated intensity as she plays.

Veiling and the heritage femme fatale

In the film, we (quite literally) begin to see the dark side of Mme. Merle when she is on her way to visit Osmond in Florence, and she wears a black, printed veil over her head, in the style of a Spanish mantilla. (Figure 36) This unusual style heralds the first scenes with Osmond where we see Mme. Merle behaving as a femme fatale. Kate Croy, an example of the femme fatale who will be discussed in the next chapter, also wears a number of dark, patterned veils in the film of *Wings.* (Figure 55) This is not merely the veil that keeps out the weather, this type of veil is an extension of shadow, like the dip of the man's fedora in film noir. These veils accentuate the face but they also obscure it, acting as part of what Stella Bruzzi has identified as "the symbolic iconography of the femme fatale":

> A clearly demarcated register of clothes, based on the contrast of light and dark (in keeping with the chiaroscuro *mise-en-scène* but also indicative of duplicity), frequent wardrobe changes (not necessarily motivated by action) and the insertion of distinctive, often anachronistic garments or accessories. (1997: 126)

The veils worn by Kate and Serena in *Wings* and *Portrait* are part of this register of clothes, and in their case, the veil can be seen as a visual indication of their duplicity. However, the duplicitous woman, the femme fatale can also be seen as what Ann-Marie Priest calls "the knowing woman." (2001: 164) In her article "A Secret Responsive Ecstasy: James and the Pleasure of the Abject" Priest remarks "the crucial relationship between an 'innocent' and a 'knowing' woman is characterized by both passion and abjection. Through a kind of exquisite agony of self-emptying the 'innocent' is transformed into the object of her desire: the woman who knows." (Priest 2001: 164) The knowing woman, who can also be the femme fatale of film, is marked through her dress. In the case of *Portrait* this is symbolized by Isabel's transformation after her

marriage into a mirror image of Mme. Merle. The first time we see Isabel after her marriage is just before her Thursday 'at home.' Her hair is darker, worn in a heavy, braided style like that of Mme. Merle when we first see her at Gardencourt, (Figure 47). Isabel also wears a black dress and gloves, relieved only by gold embroidery and earrings, much like Mme Merle's dark dress and coral jewelry when she visits Osmond in Florence. This dark, ornate image of Isabel is the one we associate with the social position Mme. Merle once aspired to, but it is also the image of Isabel divested of her early aspirations. As Isabel tries to conceal her unhappiness from her friends, she not only develops a mask-like expression, she also wears a greater number of veils.

There are a series of confrontational scenes where Mme. Merle is revealed as the femme fatale, layer by layer. In the film, Isabel's first initial discovery of Mme. Merle's duplicitous nature takes places in a rainy courtyard filled with broken statuary. (Figure 49) Mme. Merle and Isabel are discussing Lord Warburton's pursuit of Pansy. Mme. Merle, like Osmond, would like Pansy to marry Warburton, while Isabel knows Pansy is in love with Edward Rosier and determined to marry him and no one else. Mme. Merle urges Isabel "let us have him [Lord Warburton]" (James 1995: 563) and Isabel's suspicions and doubts about her friend are confirmed when she asks "what have you to do with me?" (1995: 564) Mme. Merle replies "everything!" (1995: 564) James indicates "It had come over her like a high surging wave that Mrs. Touchett was right, Madame Merle had married her." (1995: 564) In the novel, this key exchange takes place in a room of the Palazzo Roccanera, while Campion switches the location to the aforementioned courtyard:

> Another hand—a much larger casting or sculpture—plays in a later scene: when Madame Merle and Isabel are wandering through a sculpture garden. Behind them is an oversized hand, beside it and oversized foot; one of the fingers is pointed upward, …they seem to represent the 'feel' of Osmond's misogynistic threat, his control, his crushing of her "too many ideas." (Bauer 1997: 193)

"In one of Campion's most arresting visual effects, she uses a broken statuary of gigantic, isolated body parts as the backdrop for the scene in which Madame Merle first obliquely acknowledges to Isabel her machinations." (Bentley1997: 178) Both Bauer and Bentley's descriptions are from articles that appeared in *The Henry James Review*, and while Campion has changed the location of this conversation to one with greater visual potential, it is also another example of Campion's visual innovation that is in fact, rooted in James's text, much like Isabel's sexual fantasy. When he describes the Palazzo Roccanera, James indicates "a row of mutilated statues and dusty urns in the wide, nobly-arched *loggia* overhanging the damp court" (James 1995: 415) and so Campion's change of location becomes more of a shift, a filmic interpretation of James's text. The statues we see in the film are indeed mutilatated. They are the stolen remnants of the past: giant severed hands and feet, and broken torsos. These disembodied limbs recall the phrase *In the Cut* uses to describe the dismembered body: "disarticulated". These statues act as visual signifiers of Isabel's own disarticulation under Osmond, the way he enacts his physical and verbal domination. Mme. Merle's revelation takes place in a film location that Jamesians interpret as successfully visually symbolic of other themes in the novel (Osmond's misogyny, Isabel's sexual repression) but one that they have failed to trace back to the novel itself.

Casting *Portrait*

As I have argued, Campion has created a visually innovative costume film through her use of cinematic effects and through the choice of casting. In contrast to my later discussion of Terence Davies' use of deliberately unusual casting choices in *The House of Mirth*, Campion's cast is a mixture of actors whose looks, demeanour, and past roles mark them as appropriate for appearing in a costume film, evidenced by the casting of Malkovich, John Gielgud as Mr. Touchett, and Richard E. Grant as Lord Warburton. More unusual choices include Mary-Louise Parker as Henrietta Stackpole,

Barbara Hershey as Mme. Merle, Martin Donovan as Ralph Touchett, Christian Bale as Edward Rosier and Viggo Mortensen as Caspar Goodwood. Many of these actors I have just mentioned had not appeared in a costume film before *Portrait*, and their work has tended to encompass theatre and smaller independent films. It is interesting to note that Mortensen went on to play a much more prominent role in the adaptation and costume epic *The Lord of the Rings Trilogy* where he seems to be employing something of the smouldering stoicism he brings to Caspar Goodwood. Bale's turn as the long suffering but somewhat effete Rosier (in the book he collects rare porcelain) contrasts sharply with the next role he was to take on: Bret Easton Ellis's yuppie serial killer in *American Psycho*, another adaptation that would not be classed as a costume drama, although the film rigourously re-creates the novel's 80s designer label aesthetic.

Nicole Kidman as the film's star and protagonist had done some period work, prior to making *Portrait* such as *Far and Away*, a critically unremarkable film except that she plays a wealthy turn-of-the-century character who emigrates to America to escape her father's house. Post- *Portrait* Kidman appeared in Baz Luhrman's eccentric costume musical *Moulin Rouge*, and her most recent role has been in Lars von Trier's *Dogville*, where she plays Grace, another innocent (this time in the Depression-era US) who is abused even more brutally than Isabel by those around her. Grace, unlike Isabel, chooses to enact revenge. Kidman was supposed to reprise her role as Grace in two more films with von Trier, but has pulled out citing scheduling conflicts. The Hollywood rumour mill has speculated that Kidman's real reason for pulling out of further films with von Trier is that he is a director who is hard on actors. Certainly other actresses have refused to work with him a second time. Looking at the documentary included on the DVD of *The Portrait of a Lady,* it was deeply harrowing for Kidman to film the 'domestic violence' scenes in *Portrait*—sequences of Osmond's verbal abuse—and while Campion is conscious of pushing her actors to the edge of their

emotions, she is also portrayed as a caring and supportive director. Kidman has made some blockbusters like *Moulin Rouge*, but she has also gone in more unusual directions with her choice of roles, like *Eyes Wide Shut* and *Dogville*. She also seems to move quite effortlessly between playing very contemporary characters and playing historical ones, and this is undoubtedly part of her power as a major Hollywood star, the power to choose her parts. Choosing to work with directors like Campion and von Trier would be challenging for an actor, but also difficult. Kidman was originally slated to work with Campion again, playing the role of Frannie in Campion's latest film *In the Cut*, but pulled out, once again citing scheduling conflicts, leaving the role to go to Meg Ryan.

Pansy and the role of *jeune fille*

Having discussed two of the adult women in *Portrait,* it is now important to examine the girl that unites Isabel, Osmond and Mme. Merle, their daughter Pansy:

> Pansy is Osmond's creation, an artificially conserved *tabula rasa*: denied normal development, she is 'the white flower of cultivated sweetness…a pure white surface successfully kept so' (2.26) Her role first as daughter and then putative wife of a chosen husband, will be entirely in the service of male requirements—a warning that Isabel ignores. (Hughes 2001: 52)

In the novel, Pansy either appears in white ("Pansy had on a scant white dress" (James 1995: 304)) or is constantly associated with this colour through comparisons to white flowers or blank objects: "She was like a sheet of blank paper—the ideal *jeune fille* of foreign fiction. Isabel hoped that so fair and smooth a page would be covered with an edifying text." (James 1995: 328) In the film, Pansy is played by the actress Valentina Cervi. Pansy does not appear in white, except in her first scene and then briefly at a ball where she dances with Lord Warburton, an occasion where she would be adhering to the rule of white dresses for unmarried girls (Hughes). Pansy's blankness is instead conveyed for the most part by the expression Cervi wears almost all the time, like a veil. Cervi's portrayal of Pansy instantly conveys the physical impression of an older girl

who should already have made her debut in society, but her expression is that of someone who is used to pleasing others. We see this early on in the novel and the film when her father Osmond sends her out of the room with the request "go into the garden *mignonne* and pluck a flower or two for Mme. Merle," (James 1995: 289 and film) and she responds instantly with "that's just what I wanted to do,"(film and James 1995: 289) as if making the wishes of others seem her own has become second nature to her. This association with whiteness and blankness reminds us of Wharton's character May Welland from *The Age of Innocence,* another *jeune fille* type whose husband wonders "what if 'niceness' carried to that supreme degree were only a negation, the curtain dropped before an emptiness?" (Wharton 1986: 212 and film) But of course Newland Archer discovers that his wife is far from empty, and far from being the simple creature he thinks he has married. May's dresses go from pre-marital white and pink to post-nuptial deep greys and dark purples. Her husband never suspects she knows anything about his secret yearnings for another woman until May successfully banishes her rival. Pansy allows Isabel only one glimpse into her real perception of her own situation, when they discuss Lord Warburton's suit:

> "I've always felt sure of his knowing that I don't want—what did you say I should do?—to encourage him. He knows I don't want to marry, and he wants me to know that he therefore won't trouble me. That's the meaning of his kindness. It's as if he has said to me: 'I like you very much, but if it doesn't please you I'll never say it again.' I think that's very kind, very noble," Pansy went on with deepening positiveness. "That is all we've said to each other. And he doesn't care for me either. Ah, there's no danger."
> Isabel was touched with wonder at the depths of perception of which this submissive little person was capable; she felt afraid of Pansy's wisdom—began almost to retreat before it. "You must tell your father that," she remarked reservedly.
> "I think I'd rather not," Pansy unreservedly answered.
> "You oughtn't to let him have false hopes."
> "Perhaps not, but it will be good for me that he should. So long as he believes that Lord Warburton intends anything of the kind you say, papa won't propose any one else. And that will be an advantage for me," said the child very lucidly. (James 1995: 519 and film)

Even though Pansy is still referred to as a child in this passage, and in the film this exchange takes place in Pansy's bedroom where she is toying with a doll, her assessment of the situation is clear and intelligent. While Isabel remains ignorant of much of the machinations that surround her, it seems her stepdaughter is learning from her mistakes.

Pansy shows emotion on only two occasions in the film: when Rosier suddenly appears to declare that he has sold his collection of bibelots and is now rich, hoping that Osmond will approve him as a husband, and when Isabel sees her for the last time in the convent and Pansy declares with uncharacteristic fierceness that her return to the strictures of convent life have taught her that "I must never displease Papa." (film and James 1995: 602) In this final scene, returned to the location and clothing of her childhood Pansy "dwindles, not into childhood white, but more ominously into black." (Hughes 2001: 52) This shift in Pansy's associated colour forms a parallel with Isabel's shift to dark colours after her marriage, this represents Pansy's shift from a girl whom her father believes to be without a wish of her own, to one who has tried to exert her will in her choice of husband and failed. Just as *Portrait* gives us an open ending for Isabel, there is also an open ending for Pansy, who may yet grow up into a strange amalgamation of her birth mother and step mother, a woman like May Welland with every outward appearance of niceness, but inwardly working to her own ends.

Campion's film adaptation of one of James's most beloved novels has garnered more criticism than any of the other adaptations under discussion here. The film also polarized film and literature critics for what they saw as either an uncharacteristic sexualisation of James's novel, and a sexualisation of the period drama. By drawing on elements of James's text in a way that is surprisingly 'faithful' to the book, Campion creates a costume film that is visually innovative, reworking elements of the history of

cinema and photography for inspiration, as the other five adaptations embrace classical painting. The absence of traditional art works in *Portrait* is a deliberate omission that reflects Campion's cinematic style and acts as a powerful visual demonstration of Osmond's dilettantism. This rejection of the painterly aesthetic in the adaptation marks an important shift in the visual style of costume drama, a shift that is reflected in Merchant Ivory's *The Golden Bowl*, where Campion's influence can be clearly seen. *Portrait* also introduces two cinematic archetypes that will appear in later chapters: the heritage femme fatale and the collector. As with all her work, Campion privileges the woman's perspective in *The Portrait of a Lady,* inflecting Isabel's story with nuanced performances from girlhood to maturity.

Figure 32: Isabel on her arrival at Gardencourt

Figure 33: Caspar's touch

Figure 34: The *ménage-a-trois* fantasy sequence

Figure 35: Mme Merle "there are moments in life when even Schubert has nothing to say to us"

Figure 36: Mme. Merle as heritage femme fatale

Figure 37: Pansy and Mme. Merle

Figure 38: Osmond demonstrates his bohemianism in pyjamas

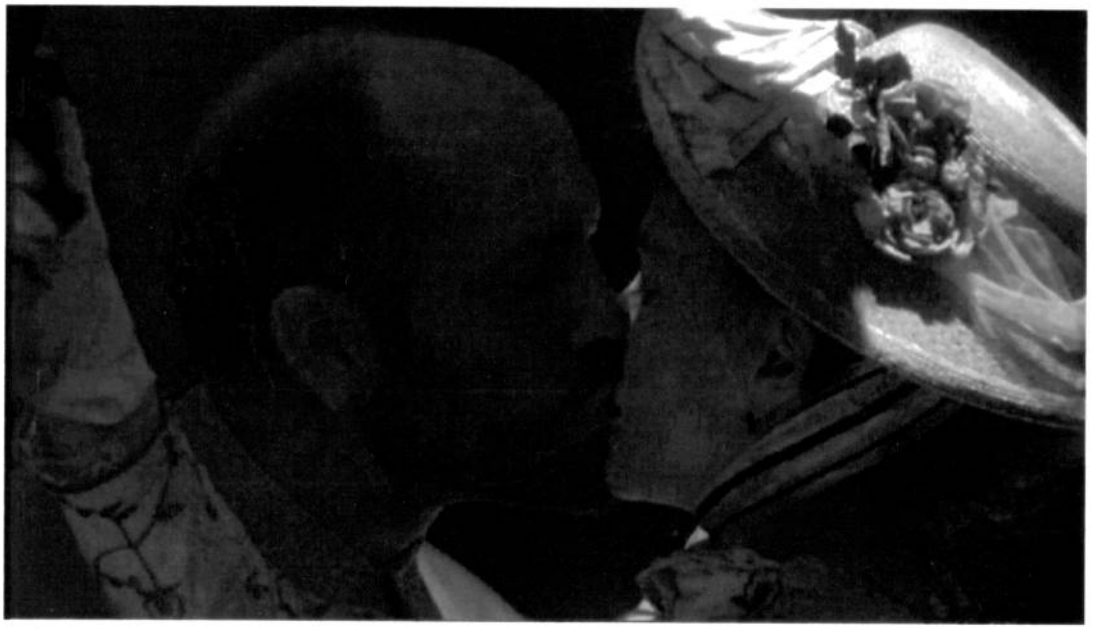

Figure 39: Osmond's seduction in the catacomb

Figure 40: The My Journey Sequence--Mme. Merle watches Isabel

Figure 41: Veiled Isabel in Egypt

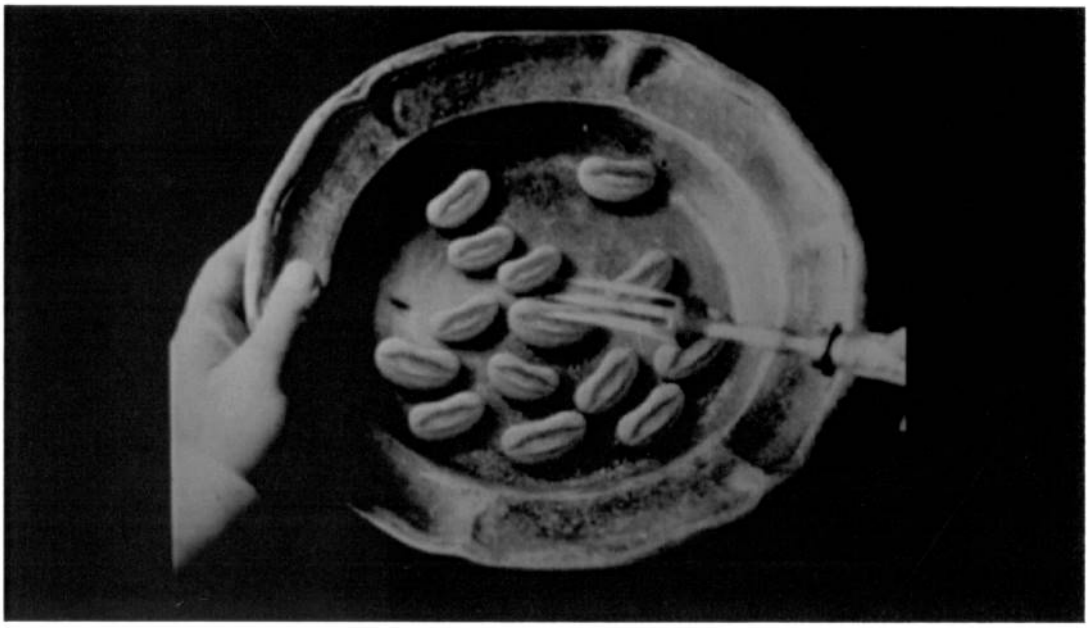

Figure 42: The surrealist beans with mouths

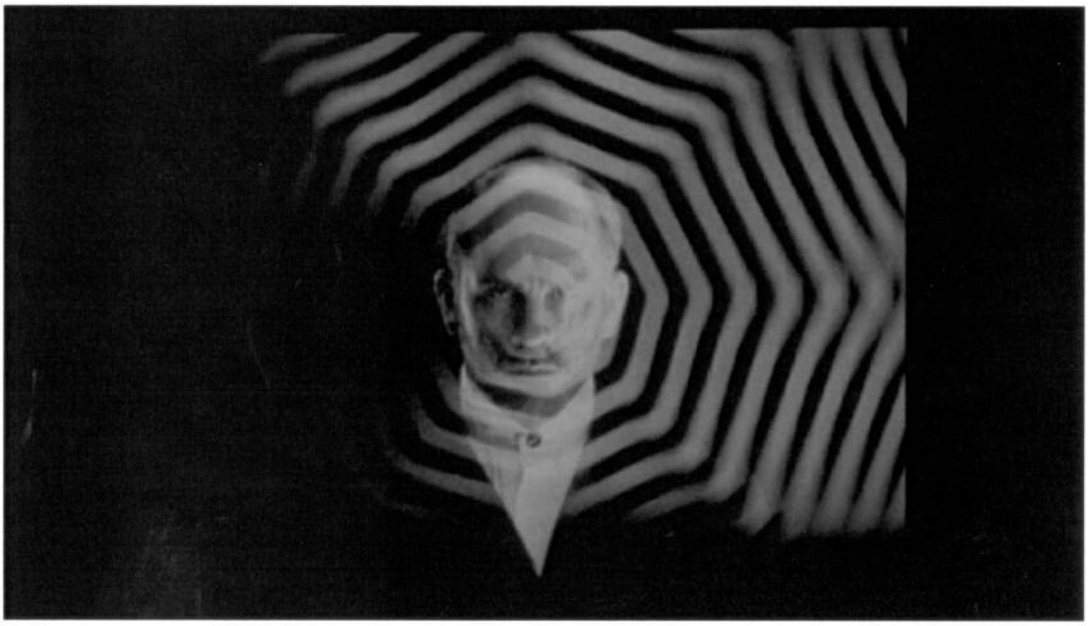

Figure 43: Osmond and the striped parasol vortex

Figure 44: A naked Isabel is drawn into the vortex

Figure 45: Mme. Merle's oriental-styled rooms in Italy; smoking and the heritage femme fatale

Figure 46: Osmond in Palazzo Roccanera

Figure 47: Isabel in black velvet trimmed with gold, with her hair in the heavy, braided style

Figure 48: Osmond standing on Isabel's train, visualising the restrictions of dress

Figure 49: The courtyard of broken statues

Figure 50: Isabel on her return to England, the return of her earlier hairstyle

Figure 51: Caspar's kiss "like white lightening"

Chapter 5: The Wings of the Dove

The Wings of the Dove is one of James's, longest and most complex novels. There is a wealth of literary and film criticism behind it, and yet it seems that every critic feels the novel has a different protagonist. Jeremy Tambling, in his chapter on the novel, focuses on Milly Theale, the doomed heiress and 'dove' of the title. In her book, *Meaning in Henry James* Millicent Bell centers her attention on Kate Croy, epitome of the modern girl and femme fatale. Clair Hughes in *Henry James and the Art of Dress*, states: "The Wings of the Dove is a novel balanced between these two characters: Milly and Kate" (2001: 67) Rarely will anyone choose to focus on Merton Densher for any length of time, perhaps because he is truly closed off by "a circle of petticoats" (James 1997: 323) as he imagines. Interestingly, despite its varied critical reception, Iain Softley's 1997 film *The Wings of the Dove* openly acknowledges that this is a story with three protagonists, what Ruth Bernard Yeazell calls " Softley's moving pictures succe[ss] in representing visually what might be called the novel's dream of triangular intimacy," (2004: 90) and much of the film criticism attempts to deal equally with Merton, Kate and Milly, particularly Robin Wood's thoughtful monograph in the *BFI Modern Classics* series. *The Wings of the Dove* takes place in London and Venice in the early twentieth century. The plot revolves around the beautiful but impoverished Kate Croy and her secret fiancé, the journalist Merton Densher. Kate has been taken in by her wealthy Aunt Maude, who wishes to see Kate make a rich marriage and forgo her old life. Kate is reluctant to abandon Merton, and continues to meet him. Kate soon meets and befriends the orphaned American heiress Milly Theale. Milly takes a shine to Merton, and both he and Kate soon realise the possible advantages of cultivating a friend like Milly, especially after the revelation that Milly is terminally ill. Milly invites Kate and Merton on a trip to Venice, which sets the scene for romance, seduction and

Milly's eventual death. Back in London, Kate and Merton are finally driven apart by their treacherous actions.

Setting *Wings* in 1910

Richard A. Kaye, in his chapter from *Henry James on Stage and Screen*, goes so far as to say that "Softley represents a new, post-Merchant-Ivory generation of film-makers who have turned to James's fiction and who are undeterred by its supposed 'difficulty'." (2000: 257) Kaye acknowledges Brian MacFarlane's theories on adaptation, which advocate a move away from fidelity criticism, towards the more theoretically and visually interesting field of adaptation as interpretation. This is a story with three protagonists and Softley's film allows the viewer to take in the importance of this triadic relationship. Although the film is limiting (and one must be limited when adapting a four hundred page novel) in certain aspects, it serves James's triad of protagonists very well. In line with MacFarlane and Kaye, I would argue that it is entirely valid to treat a novel and its film adaptation as equally weighted texts that share themes and narrative, that influence one another, but which may also have entirely different things to say to us. While James's novel was published in 1902, Softley chose to set the film in 1910, "a teasingly slight alteration which nonetheless has its own logic, and given that James revised *The Wings of the Dove* in 1909 for the New York Edition of his works is perhaps even justifiable on historical grounds." (Kaye 2000: 247)

> …[T]he chief effect of this time shift is to introduce us to a world that seems to be rushing forward. In an interview Softley has claimed that he changed the year to 1910 because he wanted to modernize the setting and speech to avoid the pitfalls of Merchant-Ivory adaptations. He wished the movie to appear contemporary. …Edwardian manners here seem edgy, poised over a historical precipice—the First World War, most obviously, when the class divisions alluded to throughout the film will be temporarily minimised. (Kaye 2000: 248)

The adaptation of *The Wings of the Dove* allows the theme of desire, specifically in the form of sex as a commodity of exchange, to come to the fore. Screenwriter Hossein

Amini freely acknowledges his debt to film noir in adapting the novel, and the use of this genre, and the time shift forward to 1910, act as contemporary frames for James's story. Millicent Bell tells us that in terms of sex, it is the second volume of the novel that introduces this modern view: "Sex, quite divorced from sentiment appears in this volume as it had not in the earlier one; already we are being prepared for Kate and Densher's conversion of it into a currency of exchange." (1991: 295) The film adaptation hinges on this idea, making desire for both sex and money the force that divides the lovers. Kate Croy, (Helena Bonham Carter playing against type) is the focus for much of the sexual desire in the film. John Carlos Rowe, in his chapter from *Henry James on Stage and Screen* describes Kate as "identified explicitly with pornography" (2000: 202) in the film. From the opening sequence of the lovers kissing in an elevator, to Kate's sexually aggressive behaviour in the billiard room at the oriental-styled party, these are the scenes that Rowe sees as invoking the association of Kate and pornography. I disagree with Rowe on this point, especially since he says this of Kate a few paragraphs later:

> Yet the corruption she represents is not simply the immorality of sexual desire confused with material interests, honest 'love' entangled with the deviousness demanded by the economic realities of the age. From the beginning Kate is also identified with the new technologies, with the working classes and with progressive politics. (2000: 203)

Wings as Heritage Noir

Kate, as virtually all the authors mentioned so far agree, is James' vision of the New Woman, a woman who moves freely in a world of increasing freedoms and advancing technology. Rowe implies that Kate's aggressive sexuality is being negatively conflated with her modernity in the film adaptation. But, as Pamela Church Gibson has pointed out, *Wings* is consciously styled as "heritage noir" (2000: 122) and as I will demonstrate Kate, alongside her cinematic compatriots Mme. Merle, Bertha

Dorset and Charlotte Stant, is a heritage femme fatale. Screenwriter Hossein Amini is frank about his love of film noir, and how he eventually chose to "…reinterpret it as a film noir in costume." (1997: v) Kate Croy merely displays the qualities of a femme fatale, even in terms of the way James created her in his novel, and Softley's film amplifies qualities already present in James's text. Kate is the woman we all fear: an exquisite, intelligent beauty with nothing but her own interests at heart. As Ruth Bernard Yeazell, writing in *The Henry James Review* confirms:

> Pictures have an immediacy that words do not, even when they are less obviously eroticised than Softly's. But rather than attempt to compensate for that difference, the film exploits it—boldly calling attention to its power to make visible what Jamesian narrative characteristically leaves unarticulated. (2004: 88)

Mary Ann Doane traces the history of the filmic femme fatale in her book *Femme Fatale: Feminisim, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis:*

> The femme fatale emerges as a central figure in the 19th century, in the texts of writers such as Théophile Gaulthier and Charles Baudelaire, and painters such as Gustave Moreau and Gabriel Dante Rossetti. If,…the archaeology of modernity is 'haunted by the feminine,' the femme fatale is one of its most persistent incarnations. (1991: 1)

Historically, this passage places Kate firmly in the tradition of the femme fatale in literature. Gaylyn Studlar remarks on the birth of the cinematic vamp "[e]merging in the early 1910s, the movie archetype of the vamp reflected the convergence of modernity and the Oriental that was already widespread in fashion through the influence of [Paul] Poiret and [Leon] Bakst." (1997: 115) The film's image of Kate combines both the femme fatale and the vamp, as I will explain later. Kate is identified as a femme fatale by her elegant, stylish façade, and elegant, sinister thoughts. The opening sequence shows Kate in an elaborately feathered and veiled hat that dips over her eyes, a fur stole muffling her throat, as she rides the Underground alone. Her gaze settles on Merton, as he rises to offer her his seat. The bold exchange of glances between herself and Merton implies an erotic intimacy. This sequence establishes that Kate is not a demure, virginal

heroine, (roles we have come to expect from Bonham-Carter in her Merchant Ivory days), but one with a desiring gaze of her own: "the vamp as a woman who pervert[s] the proper gender-alignment of power and sexual passion." (Studlar 1997: 116)

It is well established at the beginning of the novel that Kate has a talent for deception, since she is essentially playing a role as her wealthy Aunt Maude's new ward: "It wouldn't be the first time she had seen herself obliged to accept with smothered irony other people's interpretations of her conduct. She often ended by giving up to them—it seemed really the way to live—the version that met their convenience. (James 1997: 33) It is by projecting the 'version that met their convenience' that Kate manages to deceive her aunt at the beginning of the film. When Maude (Charlotte Rampling) asks where Kate has been all afternoon, Kate coolly replies "To the park…I was supposed to meet a friend, she didn't turn up." This is prefaced by the sequence of Kate and Merton kissing in the elevator, making it clear that Kate has spent the afternoon with Merton.

From the first page of James' novel and the opening sequence of the film, Kate is also identified as a femme fatale through her dress:

> She readjusted the poise of her black, closely-feathered hat; retouched, beneath it, the thick fall of her dusky hair…She was dressed altogether in black, which gave an even tone, by contrast, to her clear face and made her hair more harmoniously dark. Outside, on the balcony, her eyes showed as blue; within, at the mirror, they showed almost as black. (James 1997: 20)

Clair Hughes, commenting on this passage states "[t]his is [Anne] Hollander's 'emotional' and distinguishing black, rather than the sober, self-effacing variety." (2001: 69) Black, while traditionally for mourning, was also "…always a dramatic option for evening wear" (Hughes 69) and while virtually all our filmic images of the femme fatale come from the era of black and white film, there are certain unforgettable uses of black: Rita Hayworth's satin gown and gloves in *Gilda* (1946), Louise Brooks's

shiny black bob in *Pandora's Box* (1929), Marlene Dietrich's tuxedo in *Morocco* (1930). The use of black to identify the femme fatale also comes from her actions and attitude while wearing elegant black. Like Kate Croy, the characters in these films wear black with a dazzling sexual allure, and the air of mystery accorded the dangerous woman.

James's contrast of black clothes and blue eyes in his description of Kate, are the colours that saturate Softley's film. The careful use of colour and imagery in the film, with its poetic homage to Sargent's images of Venice, and the skillful use of Gustav Klimt's paintings, is surely due in part to the cinematographer Eduardo Serra, who worked on the stunningly painterly *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (2004), where the colour and composition of each scene and shot mirror the work of its subject, Johannes Vermeer. Blue and black are the colours we first identify with Kate, and her influence, symbolized by her iconic colours, can be detected in much of the women's dress in the film. Helena Bonham Carter as Kate is dressed almost exclusively in vibrant blues and velvety blacks, and many scenes, such as Lord Mark's party in an orientalist setting with draped blue fabric, deep black shadows and lapis blue wall tiles, demonstrate her influence seeping into the mise-en-scene. (Figure 53)

***Wings*, Venice and the painterly aesthetic on screen: Bronzino, Sargent, and Klimt**

Paintings also contribute to the aesthetic at work in both the adaptation and novel of *The Wings of the Dove.* James famously has Milly confront her mortality while gazing at a Bronzino portrait:

> …the face of a young woman, all splendidly drawn, down to the hands, and splendidly dressed; a face almost livid in hue, yet handsome in sadness and crowned with a mass of hair, rolled back and high, that must, before fading with time, have had a family resemblance to her own. The lady in question, at all events, with her slightly Michealangelesque squareness, her eyes of other days, her full lips, her long neck, her recorded jewels, her brocaded and wasted reds, was a very great personage—and she was dead, dead, dead. (James 1997: 147)

Adeline Tintner has confirmed this painting to be Agnolo Bronzino's *Portrait of Lucrezia Panciatichi* (Figure 72). Tintner comments extensively on James's fascination with Italy and Italian art in her book *Henry James and the Lust of the Eyes*, and devotes a chapter to James's use of the Bronzino portrait associated with Milly Theale. Not only does this portrait seal our visual image of Milly in the novel, but as Tintner tells us:

> …[T]he painting represents the height of her social and personal success, even though a few minutes later she arranges to have Kate Croy accompany her on a visit to the doctor, during which she hears from Sir Luke Strett her somewhat hazy but nonetheless certain death sentence. Thus, the portrait serves as both a mirror for Milly—making her aware of the possibilities of life and the almost courtly position she holds in her London set—and a prediction of her doom. (1993: 100)

The Bronzino represents social success in the novel, just as Klimt's *Danae* (Figure 71) represents Milly's erotic possibilities in the adaptation. Tintner furthers her comparison by claiming that James's "word portrait" (Tintner 1993: 102) when Milly is introduced into the narrative, "…virtually recreates Lucrezia, a young woman of mystery and beauty from late sixteenth century Florence, as a contemporary young woman from New York." (Tintner 1993: 102) Just as the Milly of the novel resembles the Bronzino, so does the actress cast as Milly in the film, Alison Elliott. Lucrezia is a young woman with a pale oval face and wide eyes with heavy lids, she has a long, elegant neck and slender fingers. Her hair is braided away from her face, but is unmistakably red. Elliot as Milly has a distinctive cloud of reddish gold hair, and a willowy appearance, her eyes are also wide and expressive. Elliot's willowy beauty is also on display as Virginia St. George in the *The Buccaneers*.

The film creates a different instance for art appreciation and contemplation than the book, and though predominantly visual, without recourse to Milly's inner thoughts as in the novel, Milly's experience of viewing Gustav Klimt's *Danae* acts as a parallel to the novel's examination of the Bronzino portrait. In the novel, Milly sees the Bronzino, becomes upset at the realization that her life "will never be better than this,"

(James 1997: 147) and begins planning for Venice once she knows she will not live much longer. In the film, Kate invites Milly and Merton to contemplate Klimt's highly erotic *Danae*, an image of the nymph being visited by Zeus in the form of a shower of gold. Rather than confronting mortality in the figure of a long-dead Italian aristocrat—in the novel Lord Mark thinks Milly "...the image of the dear Bronzino," (James 1997: 145)—instead, Milly is confronted with the sensual possibilities of the life that remains to her. We are not privy to her thoughts, but just after this encounter with *Danae*, she decamps for Venice, taking Kate and Merton with her.

In the novel, James has Milly visit the National Gallery, where she unexpectedly meets Merton and Kate, but his purpose in using the gallery setting is to allow Milly to contemplate "...paintings, with their implications of lifelessness, and of frozen, official culture," (Tambling 2000: 142) much in the same way as her confrontation with the Bronzino forces her to recognize her impending death. In the film, the gallery is the Serpentine (Wood 1999: 40) and the exhibit is a collection of work by Gustav Klimt. Ruth Bernard Yeazell comments on this sequence in the film:

> Indeed, by compressing into a single scene the famous moment at which James's heroine confronts a painted semblance of herself at Matcham and the subsequent episode in the museum at which she unexpectedly encounters the lovers together for the first time, the Klimt sequence effectively fuses Milly's self-recognition with her half-recognition of the others' intimacy...(2004: 92)

Bernard Yeazell's use of the term 'compression' is worth noting. Like *Portrait* 's ménage-a-trois sequence, the Klimt gallery scenes, and the three protagonists viewing of *Danae* act as a compression of the novel's and the adaptation's themes. Mark Eaton, in his chapter "Henry James Films as Middlebrow Culture" notes that a Klimt exhibit is probably historically inaccurate for London at this period: "Some viewers will no doubt recognize the painting as Klimt's *Danae* (1908) and might feel a sense of superiority in recognizing the clever juxtaposition of red-haired Milly with the red-haired—and

nude—model in the painting." (Eaton 2000: 170) Eaton makes an excellent point regarding the use of Klimt to achieve "a middlebrow effect" (2000: 170) but he also undermines the superior tone of his argument when he acknowledges in his notes that the painting was identified for him by someone else. While Eaton's point is valued, the identification of the painting as Klimt's *Danae* and the association between the red-haired model and Milly is merely one layer of meaning in the presentation of this 'hieroglyphic' image. The viewing of *Danae*, connected as it is to the novel's passage of contemplation of the Bronzino portrait, also offers the implication of Millly as an object of desire through her mirror image *Danae*. The adaptation's comtemplation of *Danae* introduces Merton to the erotic possibilities of Milly, as well as her financial worth, something Milly contemplates quite explicitly in the novel:

> ...[W]ouldn't her value, for the man who should marry her, be precisely in the ravage of her disease? *She* mightn't last, but her money would. For a man in whom the vision of her money should be intense, in whom it should be most of the ground for 'making up' to her, any prospective failure on her part to be long for this world might easily count as a positive attraction. (James 1997: 288)

Perhaps if Eaton were more intimately acquainted with Klimt's work, he would have realized that *Danae* is rarely reproduced, unlike the now ubiquitous *The Kiss*, which we also see in the film, alongside Klimt's *Portrait of Emilie Floge*, one of several images of *Judith*, and the exquisitely disturbing *Hope I.* Both Floge and the model for *Hope* are the vibrant redheads Klimt often depicted in his work, while the Judith is dark haired, creating an ominous contrast mirrored by Kate and Milly's colouring. (Figure 70) Eaton, (rather obviously) points out that the Klimt images associated with Milly have been consciously introduced by Softley and his art director. (2000: 170) These paintings are a logical and elegant fit with the film's decorative aesthetic for several reasons. Klimt depicted many red-haired models throughout his career making his paintings an appropriate choice for association with Milly. But, his work is also notable for its attention to the decorative details of clothing, influenced by his longtime muse the

Viennese clothing designer, Emilie Floge (whose portrait is visible in the background of the scene). Klimt's use of gold leaf, and stylized floral and geometric patterns on clothing and backgrounds meld perfectly with the dresses and backgrounds in Softley's film. This subtle, painterly aesthetic underscores the shift from Victorian to Edwardian mores, reflects the contrasting colouring of Kate and Milly, and is anything but middlebrow.

Another painter whose influence is less explicitly at work in the aesthetic of both film and novel is John Singer Sargent. Barry Maine's extensive article "Picture and Text: Venetian Interiors by Henry James and John Singer Sargent" carefully charts the relationship between James and Sargent and their mutual fascination with Venice. "Venice was not only a site of frequent visits and extended stays for both painter and writer, but a place that more than any other, evoked in works by both men anxious preoccupations with sexual identity, sexual congress, and personal privacy." (Maine 2002: 138) Maine dwells predominantly on how Sargent's paintings of Venice influenced James's descriptions of the city in *The Aspern Papers*, but it also seems that Sargent's Venice, which is also James's Venice, has seeped into Softley's Venice. Maine describes "Sargent's Venice of ambiguous encounters in a world of half-light and shadow and visible decay…" (2002: 147) and I can think of no more apt a description for Softley's compelling visual images of the city in his film of *The Wings of the Dove*. Sergio Perosa in "*The Wings of the Dove* and the Coldness of Venice" writes about the literary image of Venice as a place of deception and decay (Perosa 2003: 281).

> This ties in with James's peculiar exhibition of the death-in-Venice motif, in which, contrary to the customary pattern, the setting is characterized by wintry coldness and splashing rain. James partook fully of the oxymoronic view of Venice as decaying in her glory and splendid in her decay, a city where beauty resides in decline, and decline is a form of beauty; a magnificent city with an in-built propensity to decay, brought under the shadow of death, imbued with, and immersed in,

> premonitions of death; indeed a most appropriate setting for death.
> (Perosa 2003: 285)

These 'oxymoronic' images of Venice are reflected in the film adaptation. The vibrant colour palette of the costumes—the blues and greens of the women's dresses—contrast with the extreme heat that hastens Milly's illness. The scenes of torrential rain where Milly visits Merton, and when Merton first tries to visit the dying Milly convey this notion of Venice as a place of meteorological and emotional extremes. Just as Venice is a city 'decaying in her glory' Milly is the luminous invalid, still lovely but weakened by a disease that is destroying her from the inside out. When Merton is admitted on his final visit, Milly lies on an antique divan, in a room reminiscent of Sargent's *An Interior in Venice (1899)* (Figure 69) wearing a white dress of pleated Fortuny silk.(Figure 65) (Miller, L.:1997) In the film, there is a scene where Merton, Kate, Milly and Susan visit a fish market. Milly covers her face with her fan, clearly nauseated by the sights, and close-up shots make the fish and sea creatures appear disgusting and almost rotten. This is followed by a scene in a gondola on a crowded canal, where Milly comments on the heat, dabbing herself with the fetid-looking canal water. By the next scene, Milly is recuperating from a "dizzy spell" in hospital. The film combines the novel's elements of a 'cold Venice' with a sunlit one. The heat and rain hasten Milly's decay, just as they break down the city itself.

The film adaptation's sex scene between Merton and Kate—a scene merely alluded to in the novel—greatly resembles a series of paintings by Sargent of "…sexually charged encounters between Venetian men and women in narrow alleys and doorways in Venice" (Maine 2002:140). Jane Campion's adaptation of *The Portrait of a Lady* also took sexual liberty with James's text, and Softley's film offers its own visual interpretation of Jamesian suggestion. In the novel, Merton proposes the following exchange: "I'll tell any lie you want, any your idea requires, if only you'll

come to me." (James 1997: 317) The film makes it plain with Merton speaking the line: "If you don't understand me, I don't understand you." In the novel, the sex that Kate bestows in exchange for Merton's seduction of Milly takes place in his rooms in Venice, but the film transposes their encounter to the more decadent setting of a decaying Venetian alley, after the carnival masquerade, with Kate dressed as a matador and Merton as a gondolier. The similar costuming of the lovers in this scene can also be traced to James: "She spoke low, but there was somehow, for his uncertainty, a wonder in her being so equal to him." (James 1997: 317) The equality of Merton and Kate's desires is implied through their parallel costuming in this scene, following on as it does from an outdoor carnival masquerade, adding to the love scene's sense of license. Sargent's painting *A Street in Venice* (1880) (Figure 67) shows an ambiguous meeting between a man and a woman, and has something of the conspiratorial, voyeuristic atmosphere of the film's sex scene. Another painting shown in Maine's article is *The Sulphur Match* (1882) (Figure 68) that depicts a man lighting a cigarette beside a woman balancing on a wooden chair against a wall. Again, there is a rather louche, sensual quality to the scene, a feeling that permeates the film's recreation of 1910 Venice.

Softley, in an article by John C. Tibbetts describes the period's atmosphere: "Venice at the turn of the century was on the extreme of European culture. It was multi-ethnic with a lot of Arab, African and gypsy influence, …there would have been Casbah-style markets. And there are the labyrinths of the canal system…" (Tibbetts 1998: 315) It is not just the Venetian scenes, but the entire film that takes on this decadent, orientalised quality. James's establishing image for Kate in the novel is that of a beautiful, dark haired woman with blue eyes, dressed in black. As I have mentioned, this intense colour contrast shapes the filmic image of Helena Bonham-Carter as Kate. These same colours can also be seen in Sargent's painting *Bedouins* (1905-6) (Figure

73) where the dark eyes of the subjects contrast with the intense blue of their robes. This association of Kate, blue and black, and orientalist motifs is displayed to greatest effect in the film's second party sequence. Kate appears in a vibrant blue dress and a black coat, patterned with peacock feathers. The party itself is held in a stately home decorated in the Orientalist style favoured circa 1910: ornate Islamic tile work in green, blue, cream and gold. Kate's dress is not only fashionable in the style of Paul Poiret, but it coordinates perfectly with the colours and design motifs of the rooms. In *The Golden Bowl*, Charlotte Stant also appears in a peacock-motif ensemble, reinforcing the visual associations of exoticism and the sexual allure of the dangerous woman.

Kate as heritage femme fatale

When screenplay writer Hossein Amini says that he intentionally chose to adapt *The Wings of the Dove* as a film noir,[21] he writes " I borrowed from film noir in the way that film noir must have somehow borrowed from James." (Amini 1998: vii) This, of course, is precisely what happened, as James Naremore tells us in his comprehensive study *More Than Night: Film Noir in its contexts*. Naremore traces the rise of the popular writers whose stories gave birth to film noir, even describing this telling anecdote about Dashiell Hammett:

> ...[H]e told [his publisher] Blanche Knopf that he had borrowed part of the plot from Henry James's *The Wings of the Dove* to complete *The Maltese Falcon* (1930), the book that firmly established his reputation as a serious author. (Naremore 1998: 52)

Naremore links the themes of modernism expressed by writers like James, with many of the images that came to be associated with film noir and the pulp detective fiction that inspired many of its classic plots. Naremore goes on to describe what he feels is one of the most important images of film noir, the Dark City.

> William Blake's London had been the blighted, "mind-forged" creation of industrial rationality; Baudelaire's Paris had been the perversely

[21] See Amini's introduction to the published screenplay.

> seductive playground of a flaneur; oppressive and pleasurable, alienating and free, the Dark City possessed many contradictory meanings, all of which were carried over into the modernist era. In the twentieth century, however, the streets at night were transformed into the privileged mise-en-scene of the masculine unconscious… (Naremore 1998: 45)

This is the image of London and Venice we see recreated in the adaptation of *The Wings of the Dove*. The cities are decaying, and while life flourishes in their elaborate interiors, these are cities filled with shadows and secrets. Kate inhabits these cities with the privilege Naremore says is normally given to 'the masculine unconscious'. Kate straddles the poor world of her upbringing, and the rough sufficiency of Merton's rooms, while at the same time moving with ease in the rarified world of her Aunt Maude.

Kate's ability to move freely between different degrees of class and urban landscape is part of her identity as what Janey Place, in her chapter "Women in Film Noir" calls "the dark lady." (47) Place first describes some of the key attributes of the film noir style:

> Man has been inexplicably uprooted from those values, beliefs and endeavours that offer him meaning and stability, and in the almost exclusively urban landscape of film noir (in pointed contrast to the pastoral, idealized, remembered past) he is struggling for a foothold in a maze of right and wrong. He has no reference points, no moral base from which to confidently operate. Any previous framework is cut loose and morality becomes relative, both externally (the world) and internally (the character and his relations to his work, his friends, his sexuality). Values, like identities, are constantly shifting and must be redefined at every turn. Nothing—especially woman—is stable, nothing is dependable. (Place 2000: 51)

This passage is worth quoting in full because it describes many of the themes taken up in *Wings,* and particularly by the adaptation. Kate is taken from her impoverished father upon her mother's death, and thrust into the bright, moneyed world of Aunt Maude. Kate struggles to adjust to her new situation, but cannot leave her past behind. In the novel, Kate makes over some of her inheritance to her married sister, and continues to visit her dissolute father. In the film, Kate's father makes a brief appearance, long

enough for us to learn that he has turned over his paternal authority to Maude in exchange for a small weekly income to support his drinking and opium habit—another of the film's visual indications of decay and dissolution using an Orientalised signifier. In a way, Kate seems somewhat relieved to have done her duty to her relatives and be rid of them, but what she cannot give up is Merton Densher. Kate, adrift in Maude's world where money and social position are paramount, has already decided to make the most of what is on offer by playing according to Maude's rules on the surface, to see, as she says in the film "what I can get out of her." Kate is soon adept at moving between the poor and wealthy spheres. The continuous maintenance of her mutually exclusive relationships with Maude and Merton depend on Kate's ability to reflect their opposing values. As Kate becomes less reliable to both her lover and her benefactress, she becomes more and more the femme fatale, finally revealing her willingness to exchange sex for the assurance that Merton will continue with the plan for Milly's seduction. In the adaptation, this exchange is highly charged. Once Merton clarifies Kate's intention with the question "you want me to seduce a dying girl?" and Kate claims their plan will work because "I know her, I know how she loves," Merton strikes his bargain with the phrase "If you don't understand me, I don't understand you." The film's dialogue may seem vague here, but is forcefully clear when viewed, as opposed to James's more elliptical description of the sexual bargain:

> 'I'll tell any lie you want, any your idea requires, if you'll only come to me.' 'Come to you?'
> 'Come to me.'
> 'How? Where?'
> She spoke low, but there was somehow, for his uncertainty, a wonder in her being so equal to him. 'To my rooms, which are perfectly possible, and in taking which, the other day, I had you, as you must have felt, in view. We can arrange it—with two grains of courage. People in our case always arrange it.' (James 1997: 317)

Throughout the novel, it is Kate's thoughts and actions that mark her as a femme fatale: "Kate wasn't in danger, Kate wasn't pathetic; Kate Croy, whatever happened, would

take care of Kate Croy." (James 1997: 268) In the film, it is the sexual allure of her visual image that indicates to us the evolution of the prim, heritage heroine exemplified by Bonham-Carter's portrayal of Lucy Honeychurch in *A Room with a View*, through the liberated and intellectual Helen Schlegel of *Howard's End*, through to the claw-sharpening Kate Croy. In the adaptation, Kate enters the narrative veiled and muffled in an elaborate hat and stole, traveling by the urban milieu of the London Underground, reflecting Place's claim of "...the almost exclusively urban landscape of film noir," (Place 2000: 51) and almost the entire film and novel are set in London or Venice, with an isolated pastoral scene in a manicured park. Already our first image of Kate recalls Mme. Merle's veiled appearance as she travels alone in a carriage to visit Osmond in the adaptation of *The Portrait of a Lady*, as well as that of the vamp and "[t]he iconography [of the femme fatale]...explicitly sexual, and often violent as well: long hair (blonde or dark), make-up, and jewelry. Cigarettes with their wispy trails of smoke can become cues of dark and immoral sensuality" (Place 2000: 54). The sequence that follows Kate's trip on the underground is set in her boudoir, where Aunt Maude carefully helps her to apply make-up and then presents her with an elaborate necklace. In many subsequent party scenes, Kate is seen smoking with obvious pleasure, elegantly maneuvering her cigarette holder and acting with increasing social confidence.

> Often the original transgression of the dangerous lady of film noir (unlike the vamp seductress of the 20s) is ambition expressed metaphorically in her freedom of movement and visual dominance. This ambition is inappropriate to her status as a woman, and must be confined. ...She wants money, and succeeds only in destroying herself and the man who loves her (Gun Crazy, The Killers). ...Whether evil...or innocent..., her desire for freedom, wealth or independence ignites the forces which threaten the hero. (Place 1997: 56-57)

Kate as femme fatale moves effortlessly through the urban landscape and her visual style dominates the mise-en-scene. It is her plan to seduce Milly that sets in motion the forces that destroy both her and Merton. Softley and his production team, as previously mentioned, have chosen to associate certain colours with Kate, the blues and blacks that

dominate the film's visual palate, also reflecting James's visual description of Kate and a certain orientalised vampishness of the early twentieth century, as popularized by the fashions of Paul Poiret, and Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes (cf. Wollen: 1993; Studlar:1997). This use of dress reflects Places's notion of the femme fatale's visual dominance as a metaphor for ambition. Kate Croy is nothing if not ambitious, and her signature colours act as a signal that her influence, and the traces of her ambition has seeped into every part of the world she inhabits. Kate wants to marry her lover and gain financial independence, but as Place notes, "she succeeds only in destroying herself and the man who loves her." (Place 1997: 57)

Even though the adaptation presents Kate as the dominant figure, Merton is an equal participant in their downfall. Merton develops his own scheme to turn the seduction of Milly to his advantage by blackmailing Kate into sleeping with him. While the pivotal moment of erotic exchange between Kate and Merton is effectively conveyed, the film's use of noir elements shifts Merton's characterization, transforming him into the voice of morality, leaving Kate as the mastermind and foregrounded as the femme fatale. As discussed in a previous chapter, there are several possible reasons for the marginalisation of male characters within this cycle of films. In the case of *Wings,* its self-concious recasting as heritage noir accounts for this shift. In the novel, James makes us privy to each character's selfish thoughts: as readers, we embody Merton's sexual frustration and fascination with both Kate and Milly. In the film, we feel Kate's warmth towards Milly, as they help each other to prepare for the masked ball, and during their moonlit gondola ride. We also see Kate's icy calculation as she calmly reveals her plan to Merton in a sunlit, canal-side café. Kate as heritage femme fatale is clearly the source of contagion in the adaptation, while Merton bears the guilt of their actions.

Representations of the heiress and the invalid in the image of Milly

The woman that the lovers betray is the dying heiress Milly Theale. While many authors agree that James' creation of Milly is somewhat too ethereal—in the sense that she feels less real than Kate and Merton—Robin Wood greatly admires the film version of Milly as portrayed by Alison Elliot: "The pallid phantom of the book becomes a young woman of flesh and blood, passionately, physically in love with life even while knowing she is doomed to an early death." (Wood 1999: 25) Milly's lighthearted demeanor is one of the many traits that set her up as Kate's opposite, and this is marked through their dress on their first meeting in the film. Kate and Milly are both at a dinner party given by Maude. Kate is vampish in black, smoking languorously on her own after dinner, until the white-clad Milly approaches her with the line "I've finally got you on your own." (Figure 52) Wood remarks that the meeting between these two characters, with their looks of "...immediate mutual interest and attraction" (1999: 34) across the dinner table suggests "...muted lesbian undertones, which subsequent scenes will subtly develop." (1999: 34) While I have no objection to Wood's interpretation of the film's portrayal of Kate and Milly's friendship, I do think he fails to credit James' rendering of an intense female friendship in the novel: "She [Milly] had lived with Kate Croy for several days in a state of intimacy as deep as it had been sudden, and they had clearly, in talk, in many directions, proceeded to various extremities." (James 1997: 129) These secretive, intense friendships are often as exhilarating as a first love, and admiration can often go hand in hand with jealousy and competition. Cinematically, this type of friendship has been depicted with more contemporaneity in films as diverse as *Me Without You* (2001), *Morvern Callar* (2002), and *Whatever* (1998). In the novel, Kate describes her friendship with Milly: "She regards me as already—in these few weeks—her dearest friend. It's quite separate. We're in, she and I, ever so deep." (James 1997: 213) The adaptation demonstrates Kate

and Milly's growing intimacy most strongly once the scene moves to Venice, with sequences of shared grooming, picnics, outings and an increasing convergence in their style of dress.

It is in Venice that Milly begins to dominate the narrative. As one of James' American Princesses (Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady* and Maggie Verver in *The Golden Bowl* also occupy this category) it is her money that finances the elegant apartments, and her friends' pleasures while in Venice, and so it is Milly's wishes and taste that begin to take over the narrative. The film sets the majority of the story in Venice, while James set only a small but important part there. The effect is that in the film, the decadence of Venice seems to have as much impact on Milly's sensibilities as Kate and Merton's unfolding seduction. In the Venitian sequences, Milly's influence is reflected in the women's clothes. Kate's wardrobe comes to resemble Milly's in shape and style, with elaborate sunveils, classical draping, and softer versions of her signature deep black and blue. At a crucial juncture, Milly and Kate both wear pale cream dresses during a nocturnal gondola ride:

> The women's clothes, usually strongly contrasted (Kate's dark strong, Milly's soft, pale) are here similar in colouring, Kate's white, Milly's a softer off-white with brown trimmings. But the sense of harmony is not undisturbed: Kate, against Merton's protests, unnecessarily hires two boats, high-handedly organising the party so that she rides in one, leaving Merton to accompany Milly in the other. …The journey through the canals is also a journey into nightfall. The shade, deepening from shot to shot, is accompanied by a sense of 'things closing in', …the possibility of a harmonious three-way relationship is continuously suggested yet continuously disturbed. (Wood 1999: 65-66)

At this point, the relationship between Milly and Kate is at its most intense and happy, and their similar clothing reflects this intensity, while Merton is left to wonder what sort of role he has for the women, other than the convenience of a male escort, another aspect of his marginalisation. The increasing shadow in this scene literally forecasts the ominous influence Kate is about to exert over Milly and Merton. The simulteanous

suggestion and disruption of 'a harmonious three-way relationship' in the adaptation can be seen as a nod to emerging positive attitudes towards bisexuality in the late 1990s[22], another controversial contemporary take on Jamesian suggestion.

It should also be noted that Milly's loose style of dress is in keeping with the artistic image of the invalid in painting at this time. Diane Price Herndl's literary study *Invalid Women* and Bram Dykstra's art history treatise *Idols of Perversity* both address the cultural image of the invalid at the turn of the twentieth century. Price Herndl is one of the few writers to propose the idea that Milly is part of a tradition of "invalidism as a pursuit" (1993: 111) and that Milly is perhaps not quite entirely the benevolent dove she seems. Alison Elliot as Milly fits an 1873 description of an invalid "a little too spiritual for this world and a little too material for the next, and who, therefore, always seems hovering between the two..." (1993: 111 Abba Gould Wilson, quoted in Price Herndl) Milly does have an ethereal quality in the film: her dresses float around her thin frame, she faints in the heat, and is not supposed to go out in the rain, yet her personality remains vivacious until her final bout of illness. But before she realises how she is being plotted against, she dances, laughs, walks all over Venice, climbs to the top of churches. In one of his letters to Kate, Merton tells us in voiceover "she's alive Kate, more alive than anyone I've ever known." While this sentiment can be seen to echo our contemporary idea of 'having a positive attitude' even while chronically or mortally ill, Merton's impression of Milly is a reflection of what Milly's doctor, Sir Luke Strett tells her in the novel: "You've the right to be happy. You must make up your mind to it. You must accept any form in which happiness may come." (James1997: 160)

Alison Elliott's performance of Milly reflects this idea, even if it is not explicitly articulated by her in film, but by Kate: "she's come here [Venice] to live, not to die."

[22] The 1990s saw the release of two popular mainstream films aimed at young adults: *Threesome* and *Two Girls and a Guy* that depicted three-way relationships as acceptable. The decade also produced art-house director Greg Araki, who presented three-way relationships in *The Doom Generation* and *Splendour.*

The film describes Milly as "the Queen of America if they had one", but also represents her as terminally ill. In the novel, Merton sums up the various images of Milly thus: "...the princess, the angel, the star, were muffled over, ever so lightly and brightly, with the little American girl who had been kind to him"(James 1997: 301-302). At this point in the novel, Milly does start to feel more like a palimpsest than a person or a character. In her aspect as the 'dove' of the title, she does enfold her friends is this world of Venetian splendour, and in the film she does acknowledge to Merton that she is aware of her monetary worth, and that she has bestowed her affection and money on him and Kate because "I love you, both of you."

Wealth, Money and notions of worth in *Wings*

Millicent Bell, in *Meaning in Henry James*, sets out the idea of wealth as a dominant theme in the *The Wings of the Dove*:

> It is easy to see that *The Wings of the Dove* is all about money. It is all about the fact that Kate and Densher cannot be happy unless they get money. It is no use our saying they could have married without it; their personal and class premises make a grubby survival in Chelsea, like that of Kate's sister, inconceivable—and Susan Stringham's example (like Henrietta Stackpole's in *The Portrait of a Lady*) of the independent woman who earns her own living is simply not available to Kate as an alternative. (Bell 1991: 291)

This is a story where the themes of wealth and desire overlap a great deal. In addition to Milly's frank contemplation of her worth as an invalid, and what the film makes clear is her decision to exchange that worth for the attentions of Merton and Kate, we have Kate and Merton constantly struggling over the importance of money and how it is reflected in terms of lifestyle and consumption. While Merton seems content in his dark, cramped flat, and laughs when Milly casually invites him to Venice, ("only a princess would say that,") he nonetheless scrapes together his fare. In the film, when Kate and Milly are given a comic tour of Merton's pensione, Kate disdainfully looks at the dust on her gloves and asks "How much are you paying for this Merton?"

> Despite the advances of the suffragette movement, upper-class women in early twentieth century Britain were not expected to earn their own living, were trained for little beyond wife-and motherhood. One possible reaction to Kate today—'Why the hell doesn't she go out and get a job?'—is thoroughly ahistorical and inappropriate. *What* job, anyway? About the only acceptable genteel position for a young woman fallen on hard times through no fault of her own was that of governess, a position for which Kate—strong, impetuous, impatient, and deeply in love—seems singularly ill-equipped. (Wood 1999: 33)

Taken from the poverty of her upbringing, Kate pursues the only avenue of freedom open to her: marriage. In the following chapter on *The House of Mirth*, Lily Bart's decline into the working class demonstrates Wood's observation that upper class women of this period were entirely unprepared to take up paid employment, and that it rarely resulted in any kind of freedom. In the film, Charlotte Rampling's performance as Maude makes her into a kind of society procuress. James describes Maude as "a lioness… She was a complex and subtle Britannia, as passionate as she was practical, with a reticule for her prejudices as deep as that other pocket, the pocket full of coins stamped in her image, that the world knew her by." (James 1997: 37) One of the first scenes in the adaptation shows Maude discussing Kate with Lord Mark, one of the characters Price-Herdl describes as a "moral invalid."(1993: 191) When he remarks that Kate does not look happy, Maude assures him "she will be, this life is still new to her." Moments later, Lord Mark practically slithers up to Kate, and after he manages to deliberately mention both his castle and his London home, he ventures "but you must let me entertain you in both," Kate fixes him with a knowing look until he amends, "with your aunt, of course." It is clear from the outset that Maude would like Lord Mark's title married to her fortune via Kate, who is now her ward. But Kate is not prepared to sacrifice her own ambitions for love and wealth to Maude's designs. When Kate breaks with Maude in the film by going to Venice with Milly, Maude tells her "it didn't take you long to find a new patron," and when Kate protests that Milly is her friend Maude utters the withering line, "you're still for hire." This affirms her view of Kate not as a

favourite niece, but as a commodity on the social ladder. Our last glimpse of Maude in the film is her gift of another necklace to Kate, another symbolic object whose beauty is bound up with its monetary worth. Maude's gift is made poisonous by her cutting remark "You'll need something nice to wear around Milly, people might think you're her servant." Kate, treating the second necklace as currency, leaves it for her impoverished father at the opium den. Maude's gift of a necklace makes a parallel with both Virginia's sapphires in *The Buccaneers* and the "silken halter" that Adam Verver uses to reign in his wife Charlotte in *The Golden Bowl*. While Kate disposes of Maude's controlling gift, employing it as currency in much the same way as Virginia does, Charlotte is unable to escape from the reigns of her husband's wealth and control.

The visual representation of wealth through objects is a quality shared by all the novels and adaptations and *The Wings of the Dove* is no exception. In the novel, James describes Kate as fashionable, while Milly appears awkward. While Kate sports "her helplessly expensive little black frock," (James 1997: 90) Milly is gaunt, with a halo of red hair against the heavy black mourning dresses demanded by the period. Hughes makes the observation that "everyone who sees Milly 'sees' money, though what she actually wears [in the novel] is a black dress." (2001: 71) The adaptation evokes this for a contemporary cinema audience through Bourdieu's notion of the symbolic object, in the depiction of the lavish dresses worn by Kate and Milly. In the film, dresses appear only once, are one-of-a-kind, and evidently costly. The fabrics are sumptuous, draped and embroidered. The size and decoration of the apartments Milly retains, reminiscent of Sargent's wealthy interiors, all communicate visually, the extent of Milly's fortune.

In the novel James puts Milly in heavy mourning throughout, except for one glittering party in Venice where she wears a white dress and an impressive string of pearls.

> There was perhaps something for him in the accident of seeing her for the first time in white, …She was different, younger, fairer, with the colour of her braided hair more than ever a not altogether lucky challenge to attention; yet he was loth wholly to explain it by her having quitted this once, for some obscure yet doubtless charming reason her monastic, her hitherto inveterate black. (James 1997: 325)

The party scene in the novel is the one that alters the other characters' perceptions of Milly. Kate realises not only that "as a striking young presence she was practically superceded…" (James 1997: 327) by Milly on this occasion, but that "…pearls were exactly what Merton Densher would never be able to give her." (James 1997: 328) It is also made explicit that this party is Milly's swan song, "'She's doing it for *him*'— she nodded in the direction of Milly's medical visitor [Sir Luke Strett]. 'She wants to be for him at her best. But she can't deceive him.'" (James 1997: 329) Milly cannot deceive her doctor because she is finally dying, her mysterious ailment is about to conquer her. John Carlos Rowe in "Sex, Gender and Recent Film Adaptations" tells us, "[i]n Softley's film, Milly has the modern disease of cancer, rather than James's more romantic and vaguely specified 'heart trouble.'" (2000: 203) The novel's image of Milly in white undoubtedly inspired the adaptation's choice to clothe Milly in white when she is most ill. During her final interview with Merton, Milly wears a luminous white dress of pleated Fortuny silk, a dress evocative of the loose robes of the invalid, Poiret's Eastern-inspired styles, and the colour of doves. The use of white, also common to film noir as an inverse identifier of evil, is a symbol that accounts for Price Herndl's reading of Milly's 'invalidism as pursuit.' In this scene, Milly lies on a divan, with hollows under her eyes, while Merton tries helplessly to convince her that Lord Mark's revelation is not true.

Many turn-of-the-century depictions of the invalid woman show her in white or pale colours, the same colours Hughes describes as appropriate to children and unmarried women. Bram Dijkstra's study *Idols of Perversity* devotes a chapter to the

image of the invalid in art. Dijkstra tells us that at this time "...the mythology of the day began to associate even normal health—let alone 'unusual' physical vigor in women—with dangerous, masculinizing attitudes." (1986: 26) Dijkstra cites a number of images dating from 1860 until well into the twentieth century, all depicting gaunt women in loose, pale robes, with expressions that hover between the exhausted and the angelic, an image that certainly fits with our image of Milly Theale just before her death. Jeremy Tambling also confirms this in reference to Milly's contemplation of the Bronzino:

> The intuition of death, and of art as lifeless, and herself as being treated simply as a rich woman who is a financial asset, like a rich work of art, causes Milly Theale to identify with this portrait and to recoil from it. Victorian—perhaps especially Pre-Raphaelite-influenced—art made a cult of the beautiful dead woman, of Ophelia, of the Lady of Shalott. (Tambling 2000: 142)

While Milly appears at the height of her beauty just before her death, this is also the moment when she most vulnerable. Lord Mark, aided by Kate's jealousy of Merton's tender feelings for Milly, comes to Venice to reveal Kate and Merton's secret love, hoping to secure Milly and her fortune for himself. Instead, this serves only to polish Milly off, as her companion Susan Stringham puts it, "she has turned her face to the wall."(film and James 1997: 360) With the last hope of romance taken from her, it is implied that Milly chooses to stop clinging to life, but remains devoted to Merton and Kate. The film makes this devotion explicit when Milly tells Merton "I love you, both of you," and this also confirms her decision to bestow her fortune on Kate and Merton.

Like Tambling, Price Herndl also touches on the " 'worth' of the invalid woman...Kate Croy, Merton Densher and perhaps even Milly herself all seek ways to make Milly's illness profitable, to turn sickness directly into financial and social gain." (1993: 185) Price Herdl is one of the only critics to suggest Milly's complicity in this plot, and Milly's thoughts about her worth also make this idea plausible, that "...she, like everyone else in the novel, has learned to 'work' her situation for what it is worth."

(Price Herndl 1993: 197) By leaving her fortune to Kate and Merton, who have deceived her, Milly believes this will enable them to lead an independent and socially desirable life pleasing to both: Merton will not be indebted to Kate's family and Kate will not have to live in squalor. Instead, it is Milly's money and Kate and Merton's conflicting ideals with regard to the necessity of wealth that finally destroys their love. Kate and Merton have bargained with their bodies and emotions in order to gain this wealth, and when they finally obtain the papers from Milly's estate it is too late. They both realize that their betrayal of Milly and the cruel bargain they make between themselves has irredeemably damaged their love; Merton is unwilling to marry and live on Milly's money, and Kate maintains that Merton is "in love with her [Milly's] memory." (film and James 1997: 438) At an impasse, they part and Kate pronounces "we shall never be again as we were." (James 1997: 439)

Social Mobility and Decorum: the risks of social climbing in *Wings*

The themes of social mobility and decorum are intimately emeshed with the themes of wealth and desire that dominate *The Wings of the Dove*, and they are part of key events throughout the narrative. One of the examples of Kate's social mobility occurs when we are introduced to her father. In the adaptation, Lionel Croy is revealed first as a frequenter of squalid pubs, and later as an opium addict. Because Maude is trying to launch Kate in society, she has forbidden Kate to see her father or any of her old friends (including Merton), mainly because of their working class status. Merton's profession as a journalist and Kate's father's dingy rooms in a rough part of London (we see Kate avoiding groups of men in the street when she visits), reveal the social class from which Kate has originated. Maude, in an effort to conceal and eventually expunge evidence of Kate's less than illustrious origins, pays Lionel to stay away from his daughter. As to Merton, although James describes him as being a gentleman, (1997: 46)

he certainly has no money to speak of and this makes him "not good enough" (James 1997: 54) for Kate in Maude's eyes.

In the adaptation, Milly's illness is initially concealed. Kate glimpses her visiting a doctor's office, but it is not until she and Milly are invited to Lord Mark's country house that the truth is revealed. Lord Mark sneaks into Kate's bedroom, drunkenly apologising for ignoring her earlier in the evening. As Kate tries to retain her dignity, assuring him she is not offended, Mark reveals that Milly is dying, and this is why he has been wooing her in spite of his love for Kate: "I need Milly's money to keep my home, I have to marry her but it doesn't have to be forever." Mark's violation of decorum in revealing Milly's illness is what leads Kate to formulate her plan in the adaptation. In the novel, Kate actually meets Milly just outside Sir Luke Strett's offices, where she is unable to deny she has been to see a doctor. Kate presses Milly with an expression of intimacy: "All I want is that you shouldn't keep from me how you find out that you really are. " (James 1997: 155) But Milly is evasive, only assuring Kate that she is very content. The only characters in the novel who are aware of Milly's illness from the beginning are Susan Stringham and Sir Luke Strett. Kate is able to gather that Milly is unwell, but it is only explicitly confirmed when Milly meets with Lord Mark in Venice. In the adaptation, the spectre of Milly's illness hangs over all the characters.

The story's final violation of social decorum again comes at the behest of Lord Mark, when he reveals Merton and Kate's affair to Milly in Venice. In the adaptation, this is prompted by Kate's jealousy and Lord Mark's hope that Milly will transfer her affection and fortune to him. In the novel, Lord Mark also attempts to gain Milly's love for himself, telling her "we're all in love with you." (James 1997: 295) He knows that Milly believes Merton to be in love with Kate, but that she also believes Kate does not

care for Merton. When Lord Mark reveals that Merton and Kate have been 'together' the whole time, Milly is left with the feeling "...that he had had from her—about herself—and, under the searching spell of the place, infinitely straight—what no one else had had..." (James 1997: 298) that is, her confession that she is gravely ill. In the film, Milly sees through Lord Mark, and angrily tells Merton "he came here to hurt me and he brought me a box of biscuits."

The Wings of the Dove is perhaps the only film in this cycle where a violation of decorum does not result in a kind of exile. Although Kate and Merton disobey social etiquette by meeting in secret and engaging in pre-marital sex, in addition to their immoral plot to seduce Milly, they do not simply move somewhere else at the end of the story. The film of *Wings* shows Merton returning to Venice, but this is not an exile. By returning to the location of Milly's last moments and his assignation with Kate, Merton appears to be reveling in the memory of these events; this is not a geographic move that implies an escape into the future, but a return to a dream of the past. Merton's return to Venice may be interpreted as the film's confirmation that Merton is indeed in love with Milly's memory.

The Wings of the Dove is a significant film. Like Campion's adaptation of *The Portrait of a Lady,* it marks a definitive moment where both the costume film and the literary adaptation take a step forward. Its insouciant adaptation one of James's most complex novels, taking its cues from the novel but unafraid to incorporate the literary with the cinematic qualities of the film noir genre make it stand out. The film of *Wings* brings to the fore the narrative's key themes of desire, wealth and social mobility in such a way that it is easy for us to see contemporary parallels. *The Wings of the Dove* films Venice in way strongly reminiscent of Sargent's numerous images the city. His sensuous paintings of the Italian working class, such as *The Sulphur Match* (1882) and

A Street in Venice (1880-82) inspire the film's sensual qualities. The use of Gustav Klimt's paintings within *Wings* also acts as a visual compression of Jamesian suggestion during scenes where the erotic is being contemplated. Several of Klimt's well-known images appear in the gallery sequence, but it is the huge figure of Danae, surrounded by her tentacles of red hair, wearing an ecstatic expression as Zeus makes love to her in the form of a highly stylized shower of gold that we are invited to comptemplate. Milly is already enamoured of Merton at this point in the narrative, having revealed to Kate, "your friend, the one who came with the older woman, he was beautiful," and the protagonists' shared view of Klimt's erotic masterpiece invites us to decipher what is in their minds.

Wings is an example of what Pamela Church Gibson has dubbed "heritage noir" (2000: 122), and Kate acts as a heritage version of the femme fatale. Her cloak with the orientalist peacock motif can be considered part of the "standardized set of signifiers [that] have evolved for the *femme fatale,* such as…boldly coloured, sexual clothes, heavy make-up and cigarettes." (Bruzzi 1997: 139-140) The peacock motif, with its orientalist associations of license and perversity, doubly identifies the heritage femme fatale—a motif also displayed in the costuming of Charlotte Stant in the film of *The Golden Bowl.* The film adaptation's use of painterly images and colour schemes links it with the Jamesian text's use of art objects, while at the same time presenting a bold, contemporary cinematic image that, like Campion's *Portrait* represents a shift in the general aesthetic of costume drama. The adaptation of *Wings* also presents us with one of the many changes in character that take place between novel and film, and when Merton acts as the voice of morality in the adaptation, he provides a noir-like contrast to Kate's duplicity. Changes to particular characters feature in all the adaptations here, and range from the dramatically altered character of the Duke in *The Buccaneers* to

Merton's more subtle role. All these elements make *The Wings of the Dove* a film that breaks new ground in the costume drama genre.

Figure 52: Kate and Milly in contrasting styles and colours

Figure 53: Kate, Milly and Lord Mark at the orientalist-styled party. Kate's signature blue and black colours infiltrate the mise-en-scene

Figure 54: Kate's peacock cape

Figure 55: Kate as heritage femme fatale

Figure 56: Gustav Klimt's *The Kiss*

Figure 57: Milly with Klimt's *Danae* and *Goldfish* in the background

Figure 58: Kate and Milly with Klimt's *The Embrace*

Figure 59: Milly with Klimt's *Judith* and *Portrait of Emilie Floge*

Figure 60: Merton, Kate and Milly looking at Klimt's *Danae*

Figure 61: Merton and Milly at the masquerade in Venice

Figure 62: Kate dressed as a gondolier/matador watches Milly and Merton

Figure 63: Kate and Merton "If you don't understand me, then I don't understand you."

Figure 64: Kate and Merton in the alley

Figure 65: Milly in the white Fortuny dress in her Venetian apartment, a Sargentesque interior

Figure 66: Kate and Merton's loveless coupling

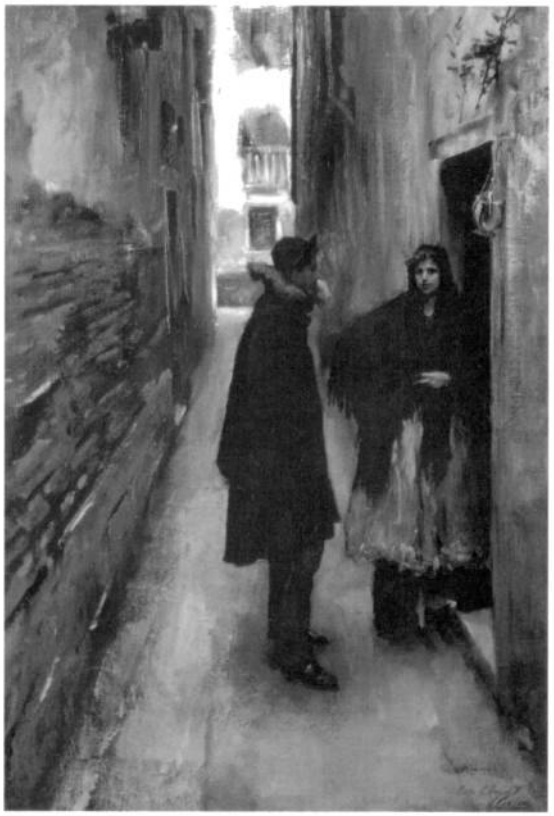

Figure 67: John Singer Sargent's A Street in Venice

Figure 68: Sargent's The Sulphur Match

Figure 69: Sargent's An Interior in Venice

Figure 70: Gustav Klimt's Hope I

Figure 71: Detail of Klimt's Danae

Figure 72: Bronzino's Portrait of Lucrezia Panciatichi

Figure 73: Sargent's Bedouins

Chapter 6: The House of Mirth

The Wings of the Dove's Kate Croy and *The House of Mirth*'s Lily Bart are literary contemporaries, moving through novels set in the early part of the 20th century: James's novel was published in 1902, Wharton's in 1905. Interestingly, the film adaptations of both these novels also appeared within a few years of one another, *Wings* was released in 1997 and *House* in 2000. Remarkably, both film adaptations also share the same painterly influence: John Singer Sargent. James and Wharton both knew Sargent socially and in the previous chapter, I made reference to Barry Maine's discussion of James and Sargent's shared love and perception of Venice. Elaine Showalter in her chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton* tells us "he may have been the model for both Paul Morpeth, in *The House of Mirth*, and the more savagely depicted Claud Walsingham Popple, the 'court' painter of Fifth Avenue in *The Custom of the Country*." (1995: 89). Interestingly, it is Sargent's aesthetic: his colours, textures and light, which characterise the production design of both films. *The House of Mirth* is set in New York during the early years of the twentieth century. Lily Bart is beautiful, unmarried and approaching thirty. A perpetual houseguest, reliant on the good graces of her somber Aunt Julia, Lily is rumoured to be "on the hunt for a husband" as she puts it in the film, but continually fails to reel one in. Her friendship and attachment to Lawrence Selden, a man who is her equal socially, but with an insufficiently large income, hinders her attempts at ruthlessness. To subsidise her clothing and expenses, Lily applies to her friend's husband, Gus Trenor, to help her invest her tiny income. Gus, unbeknownst to Lily, gives her nine thousand dollars, while Lily believes the money to be coming from investments managed by Gus. A revealing gown worn during a tableau vivant, gambling debts and the attentions of socially dubious men like Trenor and Sim Rosedale cause Lily to slip further and further down in society. After Gus attempts to assault her, Lily is cast out of her social set. Her aunt disinherits her, and

Lily is forced to work as a social secretary, then as a milliner's assistant. After she is fired from the milliners, Lily commits suicide by swallowing chloral.

In the novel *The House of Mirth* Lily Bart's erotic desires are conspicuously absent, as Maureen Honey remarks:

> Never more aware than 'faint stirrings in the blood' aroused in her by Selden, she is ambivalent about marriage to him, not merely because he does not have enough money (a convenient explanation for her conflicted feelings) but because she has mastered the art of seduction without visceral awareness of her sexual nature. (1999: 79)

Although both the novel and film adaptation incarnations of Lily share a masterful grasp of the art of flirting, it is only in the film that Lily and Selden share a discernable sexual attraction. The opening scene of the film, as Selden entices Lily to his flat for tea, crackles with sexual tension and therefore, when they find themselves alone on the grounds of Bellomont, their passionate embrace befits a powerful and longstanding attraction. The difference in the representation of desire between the two texts is key here: in the novel, Lily's primary desire is indeed a wealthy marriage, but she lacks the necessary cold-bloodedness to bring this off. Her desire for Selden is as far off as his self-described "republic of the spirit." (Wharton 1994: 70) In the film, Lily's desire is to be loved by Lawrence Selden, and somehow maintain her wealthy lifestyle. Despite her claim to Rosedale that "whatever I enjoy I am prepared to pay for," (film and Wharton 1994: 173) Lily is certainly not prepared to exchange physical desire for wealth, in marriage or any other arrangement. Even when she later tries to renew Rosedale's marriage proposal, it is far too late and her social position no longer matches his ambition. Lily's uncompromising valuation of her beauty, and by extension, her person, makes her unwilling to cast it into the grasp of men like Gus Trenor. Despite the desire for marriage bred into her from an early age, Lily's behaviour in the book and the film indicate a woman whose greatest desire is to be free from the confines of society, a desire that links her most strongly to Wharton's other heroines that succeed in escaping:

Ellen Olenska, and Nan St. George, as well the more ambiguous fate of Isabel Archer, and Kate Croy.

Beauty as social commodity in *House*

Lily's social ambition makes her part of a system where a woman's beauty and chastity are commodities exchangeable for social position and wealth. Kate Croy in *Wings* knows what her beauty is worth if she is prepared to participate in what Wai-Chee Dimock in her essay "Debasing Exchange: Edith Wharton's House of Mirth" calls "...the commodification of social intercourse. Everything has a price and must be paid for, just as—on the opposite end—everything can be made to 'count as' money, to be dealt out and accepted in lieu of cash." (1994: 376) Lily Bart learns from her mother "...that beauty is only the raw material of conquest and that to convert it into success other arts are required." (Wharton 1994: 35) Unfortunately, Lily's parents die destitute, leaving her with an incomplete knowledge of these other arts.

Lily, a serial houseguest in the manner of Mme. Merle and *The Golden Bowl*'s Charlotte Stant, laments the cost of the lifestyle she is expected to maintain, and as always in the case of this cycle of adaptations, money is frequently represented by objects: "I have to give up Doucet and bridge, I can't afford either," she confides to Gus in the adaptation. *The Buccaneers,* set twenty years prior to *The House of Mirth* depicts gambling as a contentious activity for women, and while it has gained in acceptability by Lily's day, gambling debts are still considered a serious violation of decorum. By alluding to Jacques Doucet, a prominent French couturier of the era, Lily's comment becomes analogous to *Sex and the City*'s Carrie Bradshaw's realisation that "I spent forty thousand dollars on shoes and I have no place to live." Doucet and bridge symbolise Lily's desire for finery and her lack of ready money. Although she has a small income, and lives with her Aunt Julia, this barely covers Lily's expenses. As a

houseguest, she is expected to behave and dress as befits her grand surroundings, whether she can realistically afford to or not. Once Lily begins receiving money from what she believes to be investments made on her behalf by her friend's husband and would-be seducer Gus Trenor, she suddenly has a jeweled ostrich plume for her hair, a rich red dress, and a spangled black opera cape. Her increased means are reflected in her dress. It is only at the end, when Lily's life is ruled entirely by what little money she has, that we see in close-up the cheque for her aunt's legacy as she makes it over to Gus. This lack of wealth is the source of Lily's downfall.

Pierre Bourdieu, via his analysis of Gustav Flaubert's *Education Sentimentale* in *The Field of Cultural Production,* theorises precisely what other arts are necessary for social success. In some ways, Lily Bart resembles Flaubert's protagonist. "Frédéric, finally, would seem to have all it takes [to succeed socially]: he is rich, charming and intelligent; but he lacks determination." (Bourdieu1993: 150) Bourdieu maintains that by vacillating between the two opposite poles of the field of power, "...art and unalloyed passion on the one hand, money and venal affection on the other" (1993: 153) Frédéric is ultimately setting himself up for disappointment and failure. Also, though Frédéric, like Lily, possesses most of the basic qualities deemed necessary for social success amongst the upper classes, he lacks the ability to choose "...between the two women corresponding to these social stances" (Bourdieu 1993: 153) just as Lily cannot choose between the wealth offered by Gus Trenor and Sim Rosedale, versus Laurence Selden and his "republic of the spirit." (Wharton 1994: 68)

It is hard to tell if Lily is even fully aware of how this system of desire and wealth, and their crudest incarnations—sex and money—works. With her own 'sentimental education' incomplete, and though "fashioned to adorn and delight," (Wharton 1994: 293) Lily only learns too late just what kind of expectations of

exchange are really at work in a world run by men like Gus Trenor. Joshua Miller, in his article "Beauty and Democratic Power" views *The House of Mirth* as a commentary on the social function of dress and beauty.

> Wharton asserts that when women attempt to use beauty and fashionable dress to increase their social stature, they become vulnerable to men whose power rests on the firmer foundations of money, careers, and the knowledge of law and finance. (2002: 286-287)

It is this idea that sometimes makes *The House of Mirth* seem like a cautionary tale. Lily, as Miller points out, "...believe[s] the lesson she learned from her mother: that beauty actually is power." (2002: 285) She thinks she can control her situation, and believes she can keep the attentions of a predator like Gus Trenor at bay through the kind of formal social etiquette that was meant to protect unmarried girls. But of course Lily is wrong about Gus. After she appears in his box at the opera, all society assumes they are having an affair. The use of the opera as social panopticon also appears in the film and novel of *The Age of Innocence* where Newland Archer and Ellen Olenska are also assumed to be having an affair when they are repeatedly observed in the same opera box. In *House*, Gus lures Lily back to his deserted house with the promise of a visit to his wife Judy. He then tries to clumsily seduce Lily, finally growing so frustrated by Lily's apprehensive replies: "I don't know what you want" or "I don't know what you mean" that he blurts out: "I want to know where you and I stand. Hang it, the man who pays for the dinner is generally allowed to have a seat at the table." (Wharton 1994: 142 and film) In the film, Gus forcibly kisses Lily, implying he is capable of greater violence, while in the novel he only blocks the doorway and threatens her verbally. Lily has believed that Gus has been investing some of her tiny income to great effect, while he has in fact been merely giving her large sums of money amounting to nine thousand dollars, with which she has purchased an even greater array of finery. In Gus's eyes, he has effectively bought his way into Lily's sexual favour,

believing that she is complicit in this unspoken exchange. When Lily realises this, she insists she will repay him, even though she has no means of doing so.

Understanding Lily's sexual ignorance

Because Lily cannot save herself through marriage or employment, and because she is portrayed as shallow and vain throughout much of the story, she is often perceived as unsympathetic by today's readers, and even by contemporary reviewers in 1905 who repeatedly referred to Lily as "wicked," "vulgar," and "sordid."[23] But, Wharton herself knew what it was like to grow up socially and sexually ignorant when nothing more was expected of a woman than to be charming and ornamental. Wharton describes her social debut in her autobiography, *A Backward Glance*: "To me the evening was a long cold agony of shyness. All my brother's friends asked me to dance, but I was too much frightened to accept, and cowered beside my mother in speechless misery…" (Wharton 1987: 78) In a later fragment, "Life and I" which seems to have been destined for an unexpurgated version of Wharton's life (as it was only published in 1990) she is remarkably frank about her sexual ignorance:

> … a few days before my marriage, I was seized with such a dread of the whole dark mystery, that I summoned up the courage to appeal to my mother, and begged her to tell me "what being married was like." Her handsome face at once took on the look of icy disapproval which I most dreaded. "I never heard such a ridiculous question!" she said impatiently; and I felt at once how vulgar she thought me.
>
> But in the extremity of my need I persisted. "I'm afraid, Mamma—I want to know what will happen to me!"
>
> The coldness of her expression deepened to disgust. She was silent for a dreadful moment; then she said with an effort: "You've seen enough pictures and statues in your life. Haven't you noticed that men are—made differently from women?"
>
> "Yes?" I faltered blankly.
>
> "Well then—?"

[23] The collection *Edith Wharton: The Contemporary Reviews* is comprehensive and despite the disapproving tone of many reviewers with regard to Lily, they nonetheless praised the book in other respects. Sales also clearly did not suffer due to negative reviews as Wharton cleared over $20,000 in royalties in 1905. (cf. Bell, "Chronology of Edith Wharton's Life" in *The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton)*

> I was silent, from sheer inability to follow, and she brought out sharply: "Then for heaven's sake don't ask me any more silly questions. You can't be as stupid as you pretend!"
>
> The dreadful moment was over, and the only result was that I had been convicted of stupidity for not knowing what I had been expressly forbidden to ask about, or even to think of! (Wharton 1990: 1087-1088)

This passage is worth including in full here because Wharton's ignorance mirrors Lily's and demonstrates with brutal clarity just how terrifying Gus's expectations are for Lily. Although Lily is twenty-nine, she has remained ignorant of the sexual aspects of life. Wharton's social debut and genteel marriage were painful, awkward occasions for her, (though she later became a legendary hostess) and had she been without an independent inheritance or her skills as a writer, she could easily have slipped through the cracks of society as Lily does.

Kate Croy and Lily Bart are, as previously mentioned, literary and filmic contemporaries. But, while Kate is frequently seen as strong and modern in her determination to survive in luxury at all costs, Lily frustrates contemporary readers and viewers with her inability to help herself. Kate and Lily are both launched and maintained socially by an aunt, much like Ellen Olenska's arrangement with her grandmother in *The Age of Innocence*. Even though these three women are not dependent on a male relative for their keep, only Ellen goes unpunished for her unconventionality. Kate's Aunt Maude and Lily's Aunt Julia are both presented as formidable society widows. Charlotte Rampling as Maude and Eleanor Bron as Julia both bring a frosty demeanour to their roles. Julia pronounces Lily's social demise with the withering line "I consider that you *are* disgraced Lily." (film and Wharton 1994: 169) The aunts maintain Kate and Lily only until they contravene the rules of decorum.

At every turn, Lily, a woman who on the surface seems like she ought to have something of the femme fatale about her, reveals her innocence and her desire to behave kindly even when she is at her most disadvantaged. At one low point in the novel, Lily

is clings to respectability with help of divorcée and 'social facilitator' Carrie Fisher. Wharton has Carrie observe of the ruthless Bertha Dorset and a nouveau riche acquaintance, "I've no doubt the rabbit always thinks it is fascinating the anaconda." (Wharton 1994: 245) In the film, this line is given to Lily as she examines her own reflection in a mirror, and though it is in reference to the same situation, the film's use of this piece of dialogue throws into relief Lily's realisation of her role as the rabbit who has finally recognized the reality of her situation. (Figure 81)

Degrees of Freedom: Married and Single Women

Rather than having Lily take on the role of femme fatale, as Kate does in *Wings*, in *The House of Mirth* the femme fatale role is undertaken by Bertha Dorset. A respectable society matron, she has married a rich, sweet-natured but largely timid man, who nonetheless remarks early in the film that "husbands are expected to be like money: influential but silent." Bertha, described by her friend Judy Trenor as "a nasty woman" (film and Wharton, 45) conducts regular affairs with younger bachelors, and always manages to keep her husband. Bertha seems to know Lily is not capable of besting her and so she confidently continues to reign as the evil queen of society. Abandoned by her aunt over her gambling debts, Lily is lured to Monte Carlo by Bertha, who then uses Lily to distract her husband George while she pursues an affair with a younger man. When Lily fails to conceal Bertha's indiscretion from George, Bertha turns her off the yacht, leaving Lily without any social protection. In debt and no longer able to rely on invitations, rejected by Rosedale (whom she considered a last resort in terms of marriage), and unwilling to blackmail Bertha with her love letters to Selden, Lily disappears from genteel society. The novel indicates Lily consumes too much chloral, resulting in accidental death. The film portrays a distraught Lily who declares "I am at the end of my tether." After a failed attempt to borrow money from Grace, she finally gathers Bertha's letters and goes to the Dorsets, presumably intent on

blackmail. The butler informs Lilythe Dorsets have left for the country, and Lily goes to see Lawrence one final time. She tries to convey the depth of her despair to him, finally placing the letters in his fire and rushing away. When Lawrence re-enters the sitting room, he discovers the letters and rushes to Lily's rooming house, where she has already swallowed a lethal dose of chloral, and he arrives too late. The ending of the film adaptation makes it clear that Lily's failure to adhere to the codes of decorum results in her exile and eventual suicide. Even when Rosedale—a man for whom she once felt revulsion—offers to back her financially, essentially an offer of rescue, she cannot accept, fearful of repeating her mistake with Gus.

Lily's downfall illustrates the vast difference between the freedom accorded the married woman and acceptable behaviour for unmarried girls. In *The House of Mirth*, Bertha also violates decorum by conducting an affair with Lawrence Selden, and with another young man in Monte Carlo. Even though Lily comes into possession of Bertha's letters to Selden, enabling her to blackmail Bertha and regain her position in society, Lily never uses these letters. Even when George begs Lily to confirm his suspicions about his wife, she refuses, already too afraid of Bertha's power. Because no one will speak out and offer proof of Bertha's infidelities, she retains her social position while Lily loses hers. Bertha exercises greater social freedom than Lily because of her status as a married woman, while Lily remains governed, even at the age of twenty-nine, by the role of *jeune fille à marier.*

> It all turned on the tiresome distinction between what a married woman might, and a girl might not, do. Of course it was shocking for a married woman to borrow money—and Lily was expertly aware of the implication involved—but still it was the mere *malum prohibitum* which the world decries but condones, and which, though it may be punished by private vengeance, does not provoke the collective disapprobation of society. (Wharton 1994: 79)

By Wharton's account of her own life, most girls made their social debut at eighteen. Suddenly, from a relatively sheltered existence of home, nursery, and small family

parties, they were thrust into a much larger social circle of balls, coming out teas, and the marriage market. In the novel and the adaptation, this means Lily is still being confined by the same type of social etiquette that was in place to regulate inexperienced girls of eighteen. Selden even jokes with her about this at Bellomont, when she asks him for a cigarette because she has not "smoked for days!" (Wharton 1994: 69 and film) When he asks why she replies with resignation, "but it is not considered becoming in a *jeune fille à marier;* and at the present moment I am a *jeune fille à marier.*" (Wharton 1994: 69 and film) For Lily, the appearance of being amiable and socially astute (represented by activities such as smoking, playing bridge and appearing in the *tableau vivant*) is as important as trying to conform to more rigid standards for unmarried women (modesty in dress, not being seen alone with men, remaining ignorant of sex). So Lily, even more than her married counterparts, is in constant danger of violating social decorum, while the married woman has her husband and his money to protect her, as Wharton declares in the novel: "Bertha Dorset's social credit was based on an impregnable bank account." (Wharton 1994: 254)

This distinction between degrees of freedom for single and married women appears as contemporary social commentary in the novel, while the adaptation offers Lily's social role for comparison with current attitudes. Lily's talent for doing "the right thing at the wrong time" as she remarks in the film, positions her as someone who is outside her time, whose desires are contemporaneaous with those of the audience, but who is hemmed in by outdated and seemingly arbitrary social laws. In the 2000s, the social and moral policing of women is far from absent. We need only think of France's headscarf ban, or Iran's imposition of official dress codes to realise a subtle parallel with Lily's restricted social movements.

For married women, the real danger was not so much contravening decorum as being found out. Bertha leaves proof of her affair with Lawrence Selden through the letters Selden keeps, and which are then sold by his cleaning woman to Lily. Since the cleaner has seen Lily leaving Selden's apartment at the beginning of the story (clearly Bertha has never risked this) she mistakenly believes the letters are from Lily. This event leads to Lily's impossible position, her possession of the letters which would give her immeasurable social power over Bertha: as Carrie puts it in the film "George wouldn't stay with her one minute if he knew, if he had positive proof." This proof of Bertha's infidelity would allow Lily to marry either George Dorset or Sim Rosedale, but because the letters would also disgrace Selden, she cannot bring herself to reveal her ownership of the letters until it is far too late. The other danger for women like Bertha is what happens to Julius Beaufort in the *The Age of Innocence*—he and his wife Regina only becomes socially untouchable when he loses his fortune through shady speculation on Wall Street. Even when Regina goes to Catherine Manson Mingott to beg for her social (and presumably financial) support in the name of shared family heritage, Catherine's response is "[your name] was Beaufort when he covered you with jewels and it's got to stay Beaufort now that he's covered you with shame." (film and Wharton 1994: 272)

Casting *The House of Mirth*

Terence Davies, the director of *The House of Mirth* is known for his unusual casting, and in his previous films has successfully used actors in unconventional roles, such as comedian Dennis Leary playing against type in *The Neon Bible*. In *The House of Mirth*, Davies and his team have cast several unusual stars: Gillian Anderson as Lily Bart, Laura Linney as Bertha Dorset, Eric Stoltz as Laurence Selden, and Dan Ackroyd as Gus Trenor. The choices of Linney and Stoltz stand out less than that of Ackroyd and Anderson, perhaps because Linney and Stoltz are both known for their

performances in American independent films, playing a variety of roles, usually to critical acclaim. To see them acting in a costume drama is a departure, but one does not immediately question their ability to tackle this type of role. Christine Geraghty sheds light on this contrast:

> In adaptations it is more clear than usual that actors are giving performances in particular roles; performances which could be compared with in different versions of Austen's novels, for instance, and which involve an interpretation of a pre-defined character. ...As Caughie has suggested, the settings may claim to be authentically of the past but the body of the actor remains stubbornly 'our contemporary', setting up a relationship which makes conscious judgment of performance one of the central pleasures of viewing classic serial adaptations. In addition, this gap between past and present, although it can lead to a plunge into nostalgia for which the heritage genre has been criticized, also allows for the use of irony as contemporary values are brought to bear on stories set in the past. (2002: 44-45)

The casting of Stoltz also seems unusual because of the reasons articulated by Geraghty. Stoltz has a history of playing very contemporary male roles, and to see him within the context of another age is somewhat disorienting at first. His previous roles—a jealous New Yorker in *Mr. Jealousy* or the reluctant gangster in *Killing Zoe*—give his performance of Selden a contemporary feel. We realise, as the opening sequence unfolds with Selden and Lily flirting, their cigarettes forming a genteel barrier for their desire, that Stoltz appears totally at home in a three-piece suit, black tie, or a smoking jacket. The ghosts of his contemporary male roles shift Selden into our own age. His red hair also forms an unlikely but painterly complement to Anderson's, what one reviewer called "the Titian-like harmony of Anderson and Stoltz." (Fuller 2001: 4) (Figure 75)

Choosing Gillian Anderson to play Lily was controversial, and I will discuss this in detail a little further on. Dan Ackroyd as Gus Trenor is the casting choice that surprised critics most. Ackroyd is familiar to most viewers first from his work as a cast member of the comedy sketch show *Saturday Night Live*, and later for many comedic roles in films like *Ghostbusters* and *The Blues Brothers*. In his article "Beauty's slow

fade", Philip Horne comments that "—the star performers [in *The House of Mirth*] are stripped of their comforting familiarity and seem thoroughly engaged with the ruthlessly Machiavellian world Davies magisterially constructs." (2000: 15-16) Nowhere is this more in evidence than in Ackroyd's performance as Gus Trenor, the scheming and chillingly harsh stock broker who betrays Lily. Wharton describes Gus in the following way:

> The afternoon was warm, and the propinquity made her more than usually aware that he [Gus] was red and massive, and that the beads of moisture had caused the dust of the train to adhere unpleasantly to the broad expanse of cheek and neck which he turned to her; but she was aware also, from the look in his small dull eyes, that the contact with her freshness and slenderness was as agreeable to him as the sight of a cooling beverage. (Wharton 1994: 80)

Wharton's Gus practically oils off the page, and Kevin Jackson's review of the film confirms the brilliance of Ackroyd's rendering of the character, transforming our perceptions of his acting ability from that of hearty comedian to arch villain, "—[his] smug violence as Trenor is miles away from anything he's shown on screen before." (2000: 54) Ackroyd does have a round face, and a frame that tends toward the barrel-chested, a jovial physical type that seemed to serve him well in his comedy roles. But, when taking on the role of Gus, Ackroyd's physique takes on different connotations as the type of wealthy man who tends towards portliness, a man whose tuxedo must be cut to flatter his stomach, because he indulges in all the pleasure money can buy. Just as it is startling for viewers to see actors who are considered typically modern playing period roles, the shift from comedy to drama is even more disquieting, particularly when it involves an actor known exclusively for comedic roles. There is a certain frisson when an actor whose public persona is constructed as that of a happy, even comforting figure, takes on a role where he becomes sinister, and this lends Ackroyd's performance its edge of discomfort.

The actress who brings Bertha Dorset to screen life is Laura Linney, an American actress with a rounded face and pale blonde hair. Though her looks tend to be classed as the 'all-American sweetheart' type, Linney first achieved notice in the television series based on the gay cult writer Amistad Maupin's *Tales of the City*, and one of her first major film roles was in the independent film *You Can Count on Me*, an intelligently told, character driven story of an older sister who makes sacrifices for her family without falling into saintliness or bitterness. Undoubtedly because of Linney's history of unusual but nonetheless 'nice girl' roles, Olivia Stewart, the producer of *The House of Mirth* had different ideas when she thought about the casting of Bertha Dorset.

> I have to say that at first, Laura was not quite what I had in mind. In casting the part, I would have gone much more down the line for Bertha—much more an obvious bitch. But all that false saccharine Laura brings to Bertha—she got it absolutely right, absolutely. She makes us cringe, cringe!"(Costanzo Cahir 2001: 168)

Judging by Stewart's comments, it would seem that Bertha might have been cast with an actress who conformed more to the physical conventions of the femme fatale: a dark-haired, seamlessly elegant viper. Instead, it is Linney's fluffy blonde locks and entirely conventional wardrobe that act as the perfect counterpoint to Bertha's shameless plotting. Linney's 'girl-next-door' appeal gives weight and credibility to Bertha as a woman who could fascinate and deceive a wealthy but shy man into marriage, ensure a lavish lifestyle through this marriage and confidently lead her life exactly as she wishes. Linney's looks do not conform to the stereotype of the femme fatale: no dark tresses, painted face or dramatic eveningwear for her. Bertha is at her most lethal while clad in a pale summer dress, calmly seated on the deck of her yacht. (Figure 80) The performance is that of a fiendish, blonde femme fatale in pale clothing, a technique Stella Bruzzi identifies as "a clear example of inverse symbolism" (1997: 126) famously employed in films like *Out of the Past.* What Linney does possess is the steely

gaze and verbal archness that the femme fatale often employs, all the while dressed in the elaborate gowns and cinched waists of a conventional Sargent society portrait.

In making his film of *The House of Mirth,* Davies was explicitly concerned with giving the film the quality of John Singer Sargent's paintings. He cites this as one of the major reasons he selected Gillian Anderson to play Lily Bart: "—Gillian was wonderful. I wanted it [the film/the character shots] to have the quality of a John Singer Sargent portrait. I thought she had those same qualities and the same kind of beauty—" (Costanzo Cahir 2001: 169) and there is even a Sargent portrait, *Ena and Betty, Daughters of Asher and Mrs. Wertheimer* (1901) that resembles both Wharton's description of Lily and Anderson's portrayal on film, which I will discuss in further detail later. Wharton describes Lily as seen through the eyes of Lawrence Selden in the opening page of *The House of Mirth*: "her vivid head, relieved against the dull tints of the crowd… and under her dark hat and veil she regained the girlish smoothness, the purity of tint that she was beginning to lose" (Wharton 1994: 1) Wharton's description of Lily is echoed by Gillian Anderson as Lily in the adaptation. Anderson is best known for her long-running role throughout the 1990s as Agent Dana Scully on the seminal sci-fi/paranormal television show *The X-Files*. The show's predominantly monochromatic set, costume and production design served to highlight Anderson's own 'vivid head' of flame red hair. Idolised by millions of fans, Anderson is an example of an actress so closely identified with a long-running popular character, that to see her acting in a period film at first appears deeply incongruous. Reflecting on the place of actresses in contemporary cinema, Christine Geraghty, in her article "Crossing over: performing as a lady and a dame" suggests that an old analogy from a 1940s movie magazine still holds true: that British actresses are considered to play 'lady's' roles, while American actresses are slightly coarser 'dames.' Geraghty considers this in light of cross-over performances such as Gwyneth Paltrow in *Emma* and Kate Winslet in

Titantic, where American actresses play English characters, and English actresses play American characters. She also suggests that "...classic adaptations have given actresses the opportunity to draw attention to their acting skills...the use of adaptation as a rite of passage, a testing of the craft, for certain American dames such as Paltrow and more recently, Gillian Anderson in *The House of Mirth.*" (Geraghty 2002: 56) What Geraghty suggests is that classic adaptations can function as a way for actresses known primarily for their looks like Paltrow and Anderson, to demonstrate that they are capable of a quality performance. A more current example is the American actress Reese Witherspoon's performance as Becky Sharp in Mira Nair's adaptation of *Vanity Fair* (2004). The casting of Witherspoon was a deliberate choice on Nair's part, who felt that Witherspoon's 'americanness' was emblematic of Becky Sharp's social mobility.

The Sargentesque look of Davies's *House of Mirth*

Just as Davies chose Anderson for her style of beauty, which her previous role denoted as thoroughly contemporary, it is fitting that there is a Sargent portrait that resembles her portrayal of Lily: *Ena and Betty, Daughters of Asher and Mrs. Wertheimer* (1901) (Figure 86). Ena, the sister in the foreground, wears a deep red dress, her dark hair is piled on her head, and accented with a red flower. Her expression is both seductive and whimsical, similar to the expression Anderson wears in the tableau vivant. Ena's hairstyle is strongly reminiscent of that worn by Anderson in an opera scene, where she also wears a scarlet gown—an especially bold costume choice as Anderson retains her iconic red hair for the role—with a black ostrich plume in her hair. As Anderson/Lily sits in the opera box, she unfolds a large red feather fan and gazes out over the audience as if at an adoring public. (Figure 77) In Sargent's portrait, Ena also appears to be boldly confronting a favoured suitor, her sister Betty's arm curving around Ena's cinched waist. Both girls appear laughing, confident and stylish. Their clothes and accessories—details Sargent prized in his numerous society portraits

(Fairbrother 2000: 68)—are carefully and richly evoked by the strong, visible brushwork. Davies's camera and Wharton's writing also carefully pick out these telling details. The film lingers over the presentation of Lily's back as she climbs the opera house staircase, her rich red gown, her pale exposed throat, the cloud of vibrant hair, and the inky plume nestling in a jeweled clasp. Wharton evokes Lily's happiness in her beauty at the opera, an emotion conveyed by Anderson's expression as she gazes out from her balcony seat: "Ah, it was good to be young, to be radiant, to glow with the sense of slenderness, strength and elasticity, of well-poised lines and happy tints, to feel one's self lifted to a height apart by that incommunicable grace which is the counterpart of genius!" (Wharton 1994: 115)

It is interesting, considering other period details of the adaptation of *The House of Mirth*, that Lily is presented in a scarlet dress in this scene. Although Wharton makes an earlier reference to a "scarlet *crepe-de-chine*" (1994: 46) that Lily is told not to wear if she hopes to attract a conservative suitor, we never hear of her wearing it in the novel. The context in which it is mentioned implies that the colour is fashionable, but still considered risqué by some. In *the Age of Innocence*, it is the memory of Ellen Olenska in black satin at her coming out ball that people remember as scandalous, perhaps even echoing the dramatically erotic and controversial salon portrait by Sargent, *Madame X* (1884). (Figure 87) However, to a contemporary film viewer, for Lily to appear in a black gown of the same style as her red one would seem too respectable— we might equate it with the 'sober black' (Hughes 2001: 48) of her Aunt Penniston. There is nothing for the contemporary viewer to find particularly revealing about Lily's gown in this scene. Though it cinches at the waist and reveals a little of her upper back and neck, the dress is neither plunging nor clinging, in stark contrast to something like the *Madame X* gown, which would be considered daring even today. But, by making the dress red, not only does the colour serve as a cinematic visual marker of erotic power, it

also breaks a traditional fashion taboo: that redheads should never wear red. Therefore, it is clear to the contemporary viewer, even before we hear about the rumours that have been circulating about Lily's gambling debts and the attentions of Gus Trenor, that the opera will be an event where Lily is branded in the eyes of society, through her actions and by the conspicuousness of the red dress. In *Undressing Cinema,* Stella Bruzzi claims that highly fashionable or couture clothes:

> [C]onstruct or impose a distant, unreal feminine ideal that could be termed 'too beautiful.' In such films as *Rear Window, Belle de Jour* and *Trop Belle Pour Toi!*, the role of couture clothes or the haute couture industry are fundamental components in the characterization…(1997: 18)

Lily is also constructed as 'too beautiful' in the opera sequence. The colour and style of her dress make her stand out from the muted creams and greys of the other women's dresses as they climb the stairs to the boxes. Her vibrantly coloured hair, extravagant jeweled ostrich plume and red feather fan are all accessories that identify Lily as a great, fashionable beauty. Flanked by Trenor and Rosedale in his opera box, she represents her society's zenith in terms of physical appearance, but its nadir in terms of social decorum.

Between book and film: *Mrs. Lloyd* and *Summer* in the *tableau vivant*

Although Sargent's aesthetic is an overarching influence on the look of the film, just as his representations of Venice influenced Softley's *The Wings of the Dove*, there are traces of other artists' influences in the novel and film adaptation of *The House of Mirth*. In a pivotal scene, Lily appears in a tableau vivant at a party. In the novel she appears as Sir Joshua Reynold's *Mrs. Lloyd* (1775-76) (Figure 84), while in the film she appears as *Summer* (also *Ceres,* or *L'été*)(1715-16) by Antoine Watteau (Figure 85). These are both eighteenth century paintings, and Maureen Honey in "Erotic Visual Tropes in the Fiction of Edith Wharton" has suggested that by having Lily depict a woman from a period "…valued for its privileging of simplicity, reason and classical

virtues," (1999: 79) Lily's character is granted other possibilities. By appearing as *Mrs. Lloyd* or *Summer*, Lily presents an image that can go beyond mere sexual exhibitionism, as it is interpreted by the men in the audience. She is also "show[ing] her artistic intelligence in selecting a type so like her own that she could embody the person represented without ceasing to be herself. It was as though she had stepped, not out of, but into, Reynold's canvas..." (Wharton 1994: 132) However, Lily's triumph is brief, and society does not see that by appearing as *Mrs. Lloyd*, she has elected to resemble herself rather than someone else, but only that she has chosen to wear a rather thin and revealing gown. The male reaction to Lily's appearance as *Mrs. Lloyd* in the novel leaves little to the imagination: "Deuced bold thing to show herself in that get-up; but, gad, there isn't a break in the lines anywhere, and I suppose she wanted us to know it!" (Wharton 1994: 133) The adaptation shows only the audience's rapture when the curtains reveal Lily as *Summer:* "the unanimous 'Oh!' of the spectators was a tribute...to the flesh and blood loveliness of Lily Bart." (Wharton 1994: 132)

Both *Summer* and *Mrs. Lloyd* depict women in classical dress, hearkening back to depictions of the Greek muses. The dresses are flowing, but also cling to the legs and bosom, revealing rather more than one might be used to, even in a private tableau vivant in 1907; certainly they are the kind of dresses that would require a woman to leave off her corset, which is one of the reasons Lily's male observers, apart from Selden, are so titillated. While the dress of the women in the paintings is sensual, it is interesting to note that one is of a respectable, wealthy young matron shown to be carving her husband's name on a tree (*Mrs Lloyd)*, while the other is a harvest goddess, holding a scythe, surrounded by wheat sheafs and flanked by a gleaming youth and a slavering lion. In the novel, Lily chooses an image that complements her own physical beauty, but it is also the image of, as Selden remarks at the beginning of the story, "what you're all brought up for" (Wharton 1994: 11 and film): a wealthy marriage. The adaptation's

depiction of Lily as *Summer* is more in keeping with the alternate image for the tableau that Lily has contemplated briefly in the novel: "she had thought for a moment of representing Tiepolo's Cleopatra" (Wharton 1994: 132). The suggestion of an orientalised image links Lily to the cinematic depictions of the vamp or femme fatale roles occupied by Kate Croy in *The Wings of the Dove* and Charlotte Stant in *The Golden Bowl*. But characteristically for Lily, she lacks the nerve to appear in the guise of power. Where Kate and Charlotte are at the height of their sexual powers when dressed in oriental styles, Lily leaves herself open by choosing to appear in her own image, sexualized by the costume depicted in the painting. By appearing as *Summer*, Lily has chosen a much stranger, and therefore more dangerous image than *Mrs. Lloyd*. *Summer* reflects almost too well the precariousness of Lily's social position, balanced between bliss and destruction as she is, which is irreparably damaged by how much of her figure she reveals at the tableau. Anderson as Lily in the adaptation assumes the haughty expression of the woman in the painting: a dangerous beauty to be worshipped and feared by all, but one nonetheless wearing a thin satin sheathe. However, this is far from the image society would wish to associate with an unmarried woman, and so rather than reinforcing her beauty as a kind of power, *Summer* weakens her further.

Judith Fryer in "Reading *Mrs. Lloyd*" reinforces Honey's assertion of Lily's position as the author of her image in the tableau vivant: "...she creates her 'text' with the only material she has—her own body—and then she offers it, with precise calculation, to the male artist, connoisseur, financier, judge. ...for Lily, creating her own design, her self as *Mrs. Lloyd*, is her great moment." (Fryer 1992: 52-53) While Lily's appearance at the opera with Trenor and Rosedale marks her as a sexually available woman, something the film emphasizes with the use of the aforementioned red dress, it is the tableau vivant that is one of the early tragic moments in the story. This is the moment where other possibilities are revealed for Lily, possibilities we soon realize

are not going to come to fruition. She is not going to marry respectably, and she is not going to live up to Lawrence's intellectual standards. Angela Carter once wrote in her story *Black Venus*, that the beautiful protagonist was "...like a piano in a country where everyone has had their hands cut off," (1995: 231) and as the astonished gasps of the viewers and the lewd comments of the men rise around these images of Lily as *Mrs. Lloyd* or Lily as *Summer*, Selden glimpses a version of Lily who could fit into his republic of the spirit:

> In the long moment before the curtain fell, he had time to feel the whole tragedy of her life. It was as though her beauty, thus detached from all that cheapened and vulgarized it, had held out suppliant hands to him from the world in which he and she had once met for a moment, and where he felt an overmastering longing to be with her again.
>
> He was roused by the pressure of ecstatic fingers. "Wasn't she too beautiful Lawrence? Don't you like her best in that simple dress? It makes her look like the real Lily—the Lily I know."
>
> He met Gerty Farish's brimming gaze. "The Lily *we* know."(Wharton 1994: 133)

Lily's triumph is ephemeral— she has her brilliant moment, which is soon snuffed out, and the effects of her appearance start to work against her. The film employs the previous lines of dialogue almost verbatim, although rather than having Lawrence exchange these lines with Gerty Farish, as happens in the book, the film combines elements of Gerty's character with that of another minor character, Grace Stepney. This composite character, rather than being Lawrence's cousin, is instead cousin to Lily, sharing a house with Lily and their Aunt Penniston. In the novel, Gerty is a kind of genteel social worker, who lives alone in a flat and devotes herself to Working Girls Clubs, associations that assist single working class girls fallen on hard times. While Gerty briefly harbours a crush for Lawrence, she soon realises it is Lily who really fascinates him, and she concedes the field to her beautiful friend. In the book, it is Gerty who comforts Lily after her confrontation with Trenor. In the film, Grace, played alternately as shy and secretly plotting by Jhodi May, harbours a passion for Lawrence equal to Lily's, and in the DVD commentary for *The House of Mirth*, Terence Davies

refers to Grace as "a kind of Judas." The adaptation has Lily confide in Grace after Trenor has tried to attack her, and after her Aunt's lecture about her errors in decorum. Grace urges Lily not to reveal her plight to Lawrence because, "He is like other men, they have minds like moral fly-paper, they can forgive a woman almost anything except the loss of her good name. If you wish to keep your reputation intact Lily, tell him nothing." Grace is clearly aware of Lawrence's preference for Lily over herself, and this is why she urges Lily not to ask Lawrence for help. Grace's deceit ensures that Lily does not confide in Selden until much later in her decline. Grace also inherits Aunt Penniston's fortune instead of Lily, after Lily is socially disgraced. This compression of two characters into the single figure of Grace makes the film's focus on the themes of desire and wealth more plausible, and makes Lily's tragic undoing the product of multiple betrayals.

Clair Hughes also remarks on the role of the tableau vivant in *The House of Mirth*, linking it to Milly Theale's contemplation of the Bronzino:

> One might detect echoes of *Wings of the Dove* here, in that the invocation of the portrait foreshadow's Lily's death; though unlike Milly's inward and darkly painful recognition of herself in the Bronzino portrait, Lily Bart's identification with *Mrs. Lloyd* is a very public and, to her, an unqualified triumph. (2001: 75)

This stylized portrait display of Lily is also echoed in the final frame of the film, which resembles representations of the lamentation over the body of Christ. Lawrence kneels and bows his head at Lily's side, the dress from the tableau vivant lies beside her like a pale pink shroud. Judith Fryer refers to the final scenes of Lily in the novel as a "tableau mordant" (1992: 52) (Figure 83) and this is certainly the tone expressed by the adaptation. For Honey, the novel's final scenes of Lily provide "...a deadly counterpoint to the radiant eighteenth-century figure Lily creates in the tableaux vivants. It is a harsh reminder that the Victorian age is fascinated by women in a still-life pose," (1999: 81) placing our final image of Lily in both novel and film, firmly in

the artistic tradition of beautiful dead or dying women. Price Herndl, Dijkstra and Honey all mention this fascination with the invalid or dead woman at the end of the nineteenth century:

> Numerous as well are erotically charged portraits of drowned young women who demonstrate the fate of those unable to float or to find a rescuer. Linda Nochlin indicates that Victorian viewers understood these victims to be fallen women driven to suicide… (Honey 1999: 84)

Lily, of course, is someone who could not find a rescuer and her death using a swallowed liquid, chloral, links her to these images of drowned women.

Lily and her literary and adapted compatriots

Lily's attempted self-actualization through art links her with Milly Theale, while Lily's love of money and pleasure draws parallels with *The Wings of the Dove*'s Kate Croy, Virginia St. George in *The Buccaneers*, Charlotte Stant in *The Golden Bowl* and even Isabel Archer and Mme. Merle. Jerome Loving in his chapter "The Death of Romance: *The Portrait of a Lady* in the Age of Lily Bart" claims that *The House of Mirth* may have influenced James's revisions of *The Portrait of a Lady* for the New York edition of his novels in 1908. Loving compares Lily with Madame Merle, both of whom are perpetual houseguests, "[b]oth are 'stranded' as it were, between domestic asylums that underscore the impossibility of marriage without male dominance. The source of this male control is money." (Loving 1999: 105) Although both she and Lily occupy this liminal role as perpetual houseguest, Madame Merle attains degrees of social freedom through marriage that Lily is never permitted to experience. Madame Merle is allowed the position of chaperone, and she manuvers herself as Isabel's confidante, whereas Lily is still very much in the position of Isabel at the beginning of *The Portrait of a Lady*, though without similarly benevolent relatives. Loving also draws the more apt comparison of Selden and Ralph Touchett, "[i]n both novels the best male candidate for marriage is in one way or another disqualified, creating a vacuum to

be filled with such boorish types as Caspar Goodwood or Percy Gryce." (Loving 1999: 105) While Ralph's chronic illness disqualifies him from work or marriage he manages to exert his influence with his father in securing Isabel's fortune. Selden is happy to dip in and out of the frivolous world Lily inhabits— "I've come to renew my objective interest in society" is how he puts it in the film when he arrives unexpectedly in Monte Carlo—imagining he is maintaining his 'republic of the spirit' for an ideal future wife. Even when he sees Lily at the tableau vivant as being, even for a moment, a fit person to share in this republic, he cannot bring himself to admit that he loves her, or even that she might reciprocate his feelings.

One of the key differences between Lily and Isabel is that Isabel gains financial independence and chooses to marry, while Lily grows ever more destitute and cannot force herself to marry the socially ambitious Rosedale, even when she is most desperate. Loving laments that "the 'best catch,' the best a woman even of Isabel's talent and looks can find, is boring, if not otherwise harmful. This is also the situation Lily Bart faces in *The House of Mirth*, where—it should be observed—all the marriages are horrors." (Loving 1999: 107) While Isabel receives many sincere proposals, Lily never attains this, always managing to sabotage her carefully laid plans. Like Isabel's Lord Warburton, Lily also has a dull suitor in the figure of Percy Gryce. Gryce is sufficiently wealthy and well-bred, and would undoubtedly be an undemanding sort of husband, but Lily quickly realises after a train journey with him that the courtship of Mr. Gryce would entail "...more boredom...and all on the bare chance that he might ultimately decide to do her the honour of boring her for life." (Wharton 1994: 27) So instead of going to church in an effort to impress the devout Gryce, she spends an intimate afternoon walking and conversing with Selden on the grounds of Bellomont. Lily's other suitors are Gus Trenor, who would have made her his mistress, and Rosedale,

whom she rejects largely on the grounds of his being a nouveau riche social climber[24]. When Carrie Fisher suggests that Lily could marry George Dorset if she gave him reasons to divorce Bertha, Lily refuses consider this option, perhaps due to George's resemblance to Gryce.

Both *The House of Mirth* and *The Portrait of a Lady* are filled with scheming women, Loving sums this up as "...without Madame Merle's interference, Isabel might well have made a better choice of a husband. And without the social slights of female friends in *The House of Mirth*, Lily might have survived her mistakes." (Loving 1999: 107) Isabel has no one to help her, but Lily's series of errors in decorum: the lone visit to Selden's flat, the sabotage of courting Gryce, the tableau vivant, the appearance at the opera, these are compounded by her female friends' disapproval (and in the adaptation's case, Grace's jealousy), culminating with her expulsion from the Dorset yacht in Monte Carlo. As Lily moves from the upper class to the working class, she knows she has made mistakes and considers her position irredeemable. Her only hope is to be able to repay her debt to Gus Trenor, and thereby sever her connection to him. But it is women like Bertha Dorset, Judy Trenor, Grace Stepney and even the well-meaning Carrie Fisher who destroy her in the end.

> The point is that Lily is caught between the expediency of the twentieth century, in which a woman's body was perhaps more easily the object of male dominance in marriage, and the gentility of the nineteenth century where the woman's virginity was still a vague source of power...Lily, as far as the reader knows, retains her virginity but she is also powerless. Isabel, as far as the reader knows, retains her virginity until marriage but James's heroine is just as powerless—at least in terms of affronting her destiny. (Loving 1999: 110)

Both James and Wharton use their novels to analyse the position of women in relation to wealth, social power, and desire in the late Victorian and early Edwardian eras. The

[24] Wharton also implies that Rosedale's religion disqualifies him from rising through the ranks of society. Rosedale is portrayed as stereotypically Jewish in the novel, and at the time anti-Semitism would have been acceptable in old New York society. Terence Davies said this was the only aspect of Wharton's work he chose to omit in the film.

adaptations of these novels made between 1993 and 2000, as opposed to the few adaptations that exist from previous eras, privilege certain aspects of the stories, as do all adaptations. As women emerge more visibly in society, as they gain more power and wealth, stories that recall the oppressions of previous eras become increasingly relevant. *The House of Mirth* also reflects how portions of our own contemporary society operate as if it were still the beginning of the twentieth century: there are still people who marry for money, there are still socialites who operate in a twilight world of invisible but nonetheless lethal social power, and there are still social climbers. Davies's adaptation of *House* reflects this in its highly contemporary casting, and in the clear depiction of Lily's death as suicide. The inescapable fact that Lily is not rescued by either Selden, her friends or relations sets *The House of Mirth* apart from other costume dramas that depict this period. The harshness of Lily's end, coupled with Laura Linney's performance as Bertha Doset that recalls every ruthless, blonde society doyenne, represents a shift in the kind of narrative costume drama is expected to relate. While Davies maintains a lush, Sargentesque visual style to his film well in keeping with the expected look of costume drama, the performances and the events of the plot recall realist social drama. The film adaptation's portrayal of Lily's death as suicide renders an uncompromisingly bleak view of society and the position of women at this time, evoking James's and Wharton's fascination with the precariousness of the world that money buys and forcing us to question how much has changed.

Figure 74: Lily and Selden's smoking and the displacement of sexual tension

Figure 75: "The Titian-like harmony of Anderson and Stoltz" in the embrace at Bellomont

Figure 76: The tableau vivant, Lily as Watteau's *Summer*

Figure 77: Lily and Gus at the opera, the scarlet dress

Figure 78: Gus Trenor menaces Lily

Figure 79: Bertha Dorset and her young lover in Monte Carlo, demonstrating the social freedom of the married woman

Figure 80: Bertha Dorset as heritage femme fatale

Figure 81: "The rabbit always imagines that it is fascinating the anaconda"

Figure 82: Lily enters the working class, as a secretary

Figure 83: Lily's 'tableau mordant' as chloral spills on the 'summer' dress

Figure 84: Sir Joshua Reynolds's Mrs. Lloyd

Figure 85: Antoine Watteau's Summer/Ceres/L'Ete

Figure 86: Sargent's Ena and Betty, daughters of Asher and Mrs. Wertheimer

Figure 87: Sargent's Madame X

Chapter 7: The Golden Bowl

The Golden Bowl is both James's last completed novel and the most recently adapted to the screen. It is also the final James adaptation to be made by the Merchant Ivory team, who had planned to adapt *The Portrait of a Lady* or *The Wings of the Dove* but were pre-empted by the 1996 and 1997 film adaptations by Jane Campion and Iain Softley respectively[25]. (Owens 2000: 1) As the last film in this particular cycle of Wharton and James adaptations that began with Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence* in 1993, when *The Golden Bowl* appeared in 2000, it showed the influence of these other adaptations, as well as the themes shared by the six novels under discussion here. The film adaptation of *The Golden Bowl* privileges the point of view of the two female protagonists, Charlotte Stant and Maggie Verver, while their husbands, Adam Verver and Prince Amerigo, linger more silently in the background. While Charlotte is a social climbing femme fatale, linking her most strongly with *The Wings of the Dove*'s Kate Croy, she also shares tragic qualities with *The House of Mirth*'s Lily Bart, and *The Age of Innocence*'s Ellen Olenska. Charlotte, like Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady*, marries an art collector and encounters similar problems. Maggie Verver strongly resembles *Age*'s *May* Welland, a knowing innocent who eventually banishes her rival, but she is also a tragic heiress in the spirit of Isabel, and *Wing*'s Milly Theale. Like the four young women in *The Buccaneers*, Maggie marries into the European aristocracy, but her experience could not be more different from theirs. Lastly, Adam Verver is one of James's most well-known collectors and Nick Nolte's performance shares some of the latent menace John Malkovich brought to Gilbert Osmond. Prince Amerigo is a kind of trophy husband, "a morceau de musée" (James 2001: 49) acquired by the Ververs, linking his position to that of Isabel in her marriage to Osmond, and to the great society

[25] Merchant Ivory adapted *The Europeans* in 1979 and *The Bostonians* in 1984. Their 1978 film *Hullaballoo over Bonnie and Georgie's Pictures* is considered to be a loose adaptation of *The Aspern Papers*.(see Koch 341)

beauties, Lily and Virginia, as well as the handsome but initially poor Guy Thwarte. *The Golden Bowl* takes place mostly in London within the first few years of the twentieth century. It concerns an American father and daughter, Adam and Maggie Verver and two lovers, the Italian Prince Amerigo and the American beauty Charlotte Stant. Amerigo becomes engaged to Maggie, and shortly before the wedding, Maggie's school friend Charlotte appears. On a shopping trip for Maggie's wedding present, Charlotte and Amerigo reminisce about their love affair in Rome, which ended because neither of them had any money. Charlotte still cares for Amerigo and begs for a last assignation before he marries, but he refuses. Maggie is also deeply in love with Amerigo, but worries for her father, with whom she maintains a close relationship, even urging him to marry again, if only for companionship. Adam soon settles on Charlotte, with whom he has been much thrown together since Maggie's marriage, although neither he nor his daughter are aware of the previous love affair. With Adam and Charlotte married, father and daughter soon gravitate back to their old habits, leaving Charlotte and Amerigo alone together. Charlotte rekindles their affair, which they conduct under the eyes of society. Maggie and Adam become increasingly suspicious and Maggie urges her father to return to America to supervise construction of his museum to house his massive art collection. The story ends with Charlotte and Adam embarking for America, while Maggie and Amerigo remain in Europe.

In addition to the many links between characters, screen performances and narrative trends, there is also a painterly influence that links *Bowl* to the other adaptations discussed here. Like Terence Davies, James Ivory has directly cited the paintings of John Singer Sargent as an influence on the look of *The Golden Bowl* (Ivory, 1) as well as that of James Tissot, whose paintings appears throughout the opera ball sequence in the film of *Age*, and whose imagery is replicated in the costumes and mise-en-scene of *The Buccaneers.* Sargent's numerous views of Venice and its inhabitants at

the turn of the twentieth century, as well as his middle eastern paintings and use of a particular shade of rich blue all act as an influence on the film of *Wings.* The film of *The Golden Bowl* also shows an orientalist influence with Charlotte's Cleopatra costume and the harem ballet sequence that replaces a dinner party scene in the novel. The harem ballet recalls not only Sargent's middle eastern paintings, such as *Fumée d' Ambre Gris* (1880) but Diaghilev's *Ballet Russes* (Figures 104 and 106) "seen for the first time in Europe in Paris in 1908." (Black and Garland 1975: 311) *Age* also presents the fashionable influence of the east in the décor and dress of Ellen Olenska, and Clair Hughes confirms that "the oriental had been an alternative minority fashion since the 1860s, a part of the Aesthetic, 'greenery-yallery' vogue associated with Liberty's Oriental Emporium." (Hughes 2001: 147) Even *Portrait* displays a connection to the later Victorian and early Edwardian fascination with the near and far east in the sequence where a veiled Isabel and Mme. Merle travel in Egypt. This variety of visual influences from the world of fashion and art puts to shame the phrase "the Laura Ashley School of Nostalgic Filmaking" (qtd in Higson 1996: 248) once infamously applied to the films of Merchant Ivory, and often extended to other costume dramas.

Dispelling the myth of 'The Laura Ashley School of Nostalgic Filmaking'

This assessment of costume drama as a mere showcase for historical dress and objects is often the result of shallow viewing practice or memories of an earlier period of costume drama. If we take as an example the BBC television adaptation of *Portrait* from 1968, the label "Laura Ashley School of Nostalgic Filmaking" is more appropriate. The 1968 television adaptation is visually static, with characters shot often from a single perspective. There are few exterior or location shots, giving the whole adaptation a claustrophobic air, and it is easy to detect most scenes were shot on relatively generic sets. The dialogue is lifted directly from the novel, with almost no adaptation for the television medium. The men's costumes are in muted tones of grey

and brown, the women in pastel shades of blue, pink or orange. The 1968 *Portrait* looks and feels as if you are watching a rather plodding stage version incidentally filmed for television. If there is an element of nostalgia here, it appears to be nostalgia for a period before television, when theatre was the popular medium for seeing adaptations. Bearing in mind the difference in production values, the 1968 *Portrait* cannot be said to resemble a film like *A Room with a View* except perhaps with regard to the pale colour palette consistent with a summer wardrobe. With regards to the 'Laura Ashley' aspect, Ashley first began producing her clothes in the late 60s, and her 'peasant look' quickly became popular as the clothes were both affordable and easy to wear. (Black and Garland 1975: 360) Ashley's style is most often associated with pastel colours, lace, ruffles, and delicate floral prints, stylistic elements also popular in the period in which the costume dramas discussed here are set, the 1870s through 1910. But, the comment 'Laura Ashley School of Nostalgic Filmaking' is not merely intended to connote a highly feminized version of the past, but also a conservative one, as Ashley's designs later became associated with a middle class taste for interior decoration schemes of floral chintz and 80s conservative politics. Critics and theorists are still divided as to whether Merchant Ivory make bold, elaborate costume drama or whether they are merely an arm of the promotions department of the National Trust. As Merchant Ivory have made their name with films like *Howard's End,* and *The Golden Bowl*, it is understandable that they would receive this type of criticism, while other directors and their teams, normally directors who are either well-respected (Davies, Scorsese, Campion) or taking their first stab at the genre (Softley)[26], are exempt from accusations of propping up the heritage industry or preserving a conservative vision of the past. Had the Phillip Saville-directed *The Buccaneers* received more widespread critical attention,

[26] Softley's first film, *Backbeat*, tells the story of The Beatles' early days in Germany. Again, despite being set in the past, this film, like Scorsese's Mafia films, would not generally be classed as a costume drama.

it too might have been accused of being a purveyor of 'the Laura Ashley School of Nostalgic Filmaking' for its grand display of heritage properties and Tissot-inspired mise-en-scene. Given the sheer amount of critical material about costume dramas, particularly literary adaptations, that continues to be produced, it is no longer appropriate to automatically align these films and television serials with a conservative ideology, and even early proponents of this view (see Higson 1993) have since tempered their opinions.

Shared roles: Kate Croy and Charlotte Stant

Kate Croy in *Wings* and Charlotte Stant in *Bowl* share many qualities. Both are beautiful, witty, and well-dressed. They are both poor, with a talent for insinuating themselves into wealthy society. Both must marry to attain a high social position and the degree of personal wealth they desire. In the novel, Kate's ambiguous fate is lamented by Merton in this way "what a person she would be if they *had* been rich—with what a genius for the so-called great life, what presence for the so-called great house, what a grace for the so-called great positions!" (James 1997: 432) While Charlotte Stant, hovering on a similar possible fate before she marries Adam Verver is described by Maggie as "Great in nature, in character, in spirit. Great in life." (James 2001: 167) Both Kate and Charlotte have the talent of being social successes. While Kate has the tutelage and protection of her Aunt Maude, Charlotte has been using her admirable social skills to ensure a roof over her head since she left school, as she appears to be entirely without family. It is Charlotte's talent for being agreeable that first prompts Maggie to leave her father with her old school friend, while she and Amerigo travel abroad. When Maggie tells her father she feels she has abandoned him since her marriage and implies he ought to marry again (James 2001: 160-163), Adam soon settles on Charlotte, despite their considerable age difference. Once married, it is Charlotte's success in society that becomes her chief duty as Adam's wife and Maggie

and Amerigo's stepmother "Mrs. Verver was definitely and by general acclamation in charge of the 'social relations' of the family." (James 2001: 262)

Just as Kate and Charlotte have a talent for social life, they are also both portrayed as femmes fatales, particularly in the film adaptations. Both Kate and Charlotte are fashionable, cosmopolitan women torn between sexual desire and social duty. While Kate is determined to marry Merton with Milly's money, Charlotte's story has an even more complex twist, in that by marrying Adam she becomes her lover's stepmother. After both their marriages, father and daughter soon fall into their old pattern of being constantly together, leaving Amerigo and Charlotte to their own devices. Charlotte uses this opportunity to recommence their affair.

The adaptation opens differently, with an allegorical episode drawn from Amerigo's family history: a son and step-mother in bed together, betrayed and then revealed to the patriarch who orders them put to death. This tale dissolves into a shot of Amerigo and Charlotte strolling through his crumbling palazzo as he relates this story, along with the impecunious history of his ancestors, a scene that echoes the one that takes place between Seadown and Virginia on their wedding day in *The Buccaneers*. This discussion leads naturally to the reason for the end of their affair, even though Charlotte claims she does not care about their lack of money and angrily begs him not to end it. This sequence does not appear in the novel, but without it the film would be near incomprehensible, as it readies the viewer for the ensuing ornate intrigue and sets up Charlotte's passion against Amerigo's cool practicality. Where Kate is the cool femme fatale, who does not allow emotion to interfere with her plan until it is too late, (it is her jealousy and fear of Merton's sincere attachment to Milly that prompts her to reveal all to Lord Mark,) Charlotte is the passionate femme fatale. While she loves the solidity of her social position as Mrs. Verver, especially the freedom to buy anything

she wants after years of genteel poverty as a perpetual houseguest, she cannot bring herself to forgo Amerigo. It is Charlotte's desire that re-ignites the affair, and her boldness that results in the tryst at Glouchester. Charlotte's desire is finally usurped by Maggie's calculations, and by Adam's decision to return to American City to supervise construction of his museum. In terms of Charlotte's role as a femme fatale, Janey Place remarks in "Women in Film Noir":

> It is not their inevitable demise we remember but rather their strong, dangerous and, above all, exciting sexuality. In film noir we observe both the social action of myth which damns the sexual woman and all who become enmeshed by her, and a particularly potent stylistic presentation of the sexual strength of woman which man fears. (Place 2000: 48)

This is the quality Charlotte Stant possesses, and Uma Thurman's performance of the role in the film reflects this. Thurman's legendary, slightly unusual beauty gives Charlotte the same visual impact as James's memorable description of Amerigo looking at Charlotte in the novel:

> He saw the sleeves of her jacket drawn to her wrists, but he again made out the free arms within them to be of the completely rounded, polished slimness that Florentine sculptors in the great time had loved and of which the apparent firmness is expressed in their old silver and old bronze. He knew her narrow hands, he knew her long fingers and the shape and colour of her finger-nails, he knew her special beauty of movement and line when she turned her back, and the perfect working of all her main attachments, that of some wonderful finished instrument, something intently made for exhibition, for a prize. He knew above all the extraordinary fineness of her flexible waist, the stem of an expanded flower, which gave her a likeness also to some long loose silk purse, well filled with gold-pieces, but having been passed through a finger-ring that held it together. (James 2001: 73)

Thurman's height, emphasized by the long line of 1903 fashions, her waist length golden hair and prominent facial features make her an image to be reckoned with, an image on par with the stunning description James offers us in the novel. This passage describes Amerigo's first glimpse of his old lover since their parting in Rome, and she has lost none of her power to fascinate. Amerigo's knowledge of Charlotte's figure makes it clear they have been lovers in the past, and establishes Charlotte's considerable

sexual allure. The adaptation captures this through its casting of Thurman, (who once played the goddess Venus in *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen*) and through the invented parting scene in the palazzo. In the end, Charlotte is in effect banished to America with Adam, with an entire ocean between herself and her lover. Her sexual desire has not been enough to overwhelm Amerigo, to make him give up his marriage and run away with her. Nonetheless, as the femme fatale Charlotte is the presence we remember. In the novel, Charlotte constantly outshines Maggie socially. In the adaptation, Thurman's height and yards of golden hair, her ability to carry off magnificent jewels and dresses, visually overshadows Kate Beckinsale as the plain, petite brunette Maggie, in much the same way as Michelle Pfeiffer's Ellen and Winona Ryder's May in *The Age of Innocence*.

Charlotte as orientalised femme fatale

Charlotte's identity as a cinematic femme fatale is displayed most effectively in the Lancaster House ball sequence where she waits conspicuously on a grand staircase, drinking in the gaze of society:

> [B]ut she missed no countenance and invited no protection; she fairly liked to be, so long as she might, just as she was—exposed a little to the public, no doubt, in her unaccompanied state, but, even if it were a bit brazen, careless of queer reflections on the dull polish of London faces, and exposed, since it was a question of exposure, to much more competent recognitions of her own. (James 2001: 214)

The adaptation makes this occasion a costume ball, recalling the masquerade sequence in *Wings,* with Charlotte dressed as Cleopatra in a magnificent gold and turquoise gown, with a peacock feather headdress. (Figure 91) By framing Charlotte's admittedly brazen behaviour, standing on the stair as she waits for Amerigo, in the costume of a legendary queen and seductress, one with the exotic, sexualized connotations of the middle east, the viewer sees Place's "potent stylistic representation of the sexual strength of woman" in the figure of Charlotte. Charlotte's costume also recalls a party sequence in the

adaptation of *Wings* where Kate wears a peacock patterned black wrap as she lures Merton to the billiard room to renew their affair. Charlotte's Cleopatra costume functions in much the same way as Kate's peacock wrap, veiled hats and languorous smoking in *Wings*: these are visual cues to indicate the femme fatale at the height of her influence.

In his article "The Golden Film: Charlotte Stand and the Palace Guards" Leland S. Person remarks "the Merchant Ivory *Golden Bowl* explores and polices the consequences of granting women the power to judge manliness and male sexual potency," (Person 2002: 26) and this is part of the femme fatale's power, as well as what I feel is a general trend within this cycle of adaptations to "invest their single heroines with more sexual desire and a more liberated willingness to indulge it than James or Wharton had imagined." (Person 2002: 29) The sexual agency of the femme fatale, of women who choose as Charlotte chooses to rekindle her relationship with Amerigo, is very attractive to a contemporary audience. When we see Charlotte straddling Amerigo in their bedroom at the inn in Glouchester, it is what we expect, but perhaps not initially from the people saddled with the reputation of 'Laura Ashley School of Nostalgic Film-making.' This false reputation for primness that precedes any Merchant Ivory production (despite ample evidence to the contrary as argued by Monk 2001, Dyer 2001, Francke 2001) adds to the viewer's frisson, that we see Charlotte behaving in a way James only implies, and that perhaps we expect the adaptation to imply.

Charlotte, Kate Croy and Lily Bart are all social climbers whose plans go awry. In *Wings,* Milly comes between Kate and Merton even after her death, making the money a hollow victory. Charlotte is forced to return to America, the place she has left years before, shackled to her much older husband, and separated from her lover.

Charlotte is the more unabashededly socially aspirant than the others, in that she marries to be close to her lover, and in doing so she goes where Lily Bart, and even Kate Croy, are afraid to go, but as Person puts it, "neither Charlotte nor Lily is willing to prostitute herself quite enough." (2002: 28) Lily cannot bring herself to marry any of the men for their money, even though she appears in the most precarious financial and social position. Nor can Lily confess her troubles or her feelings to the ambivalent Lawrence. Charlotte does force herself to marry, because she is tired of being homeless, rootless and poor, but like Kate, she is determined to retain her lover.

The high class wife: Charlotte and Isabel

Charlotte also has much in common with Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady,* in the sense that both women are married to art collectors who prefer objects to people. Isabel and Charlotte both represent 'the social front' in their marriages and all social duties are placed upon them, while their husbands prefer to contemplate their collections, only emerging when absolutely necessary. Both Isabel and Charlotte are adorned in a particular way that displays their wealth and their husband's taste. Isabel and Charlotte, prior to their marriage, wear their hair loose and dress in plainer, more practical styles. Their dress and appearance prior to marriage reflects youth and a desire for freedom of movement. After marriage, Isabel is filmed in a way that shows her heavy hairstyle weighing her down and her dress tripping her up. Charlotte's golden mane is restrained in high, tight hairstyles, her necklines are often more closed and she is constantly bedecked with jewellry. Crucially, the only time Charlotte appears in the adaptation dressed in her pre-marital style after her marrage is when she rekindles her affair with Amerigo, as she tells him she has been longing for the time "when I could do as I liked." This display of taste accords with Thorstein Veblen's definition of the high class wife:

> She is useless and expensive, and she is consequently valuable as evidence of pecuniary strength. It results that at this cultural stage women take thought to alter their persons, so as to conform more nearly to the requirements of the instructed taste of the time; and under the guidance of the canon of pecuniary decency, the men find the resulting artificially induced pathological features attractive. Yet there is no room to question their attractiveness to men whose scheme of life they fit as honorific items sanctioned by the requirements of pecuniary reputability. (Veblen 1994: 149)

The film of *The Golden Bowl* contains a scene that illustrates Veblen's theory of the high class wife. In the film of *Bowl,* Charlotte is packing for a weekend in the country and Adam announces he no longer intends to go and tries to persuade her to decline as well. When Charlotte does not respond to his suggestion, Adam relents immediately, saying "the whole world must see you in all your splendour," to which Charlotte replies "Well Adam, we can't all hide ourselves away from the world. Someone has to go to these sort of things, whether we want to or not." Adam then selects a heavy gold chain from her jewellry box, placing it around her neck. (Figure 94) This scene recalls James's description of Adam and Charlotte's relationship: "...the likeness of their connexion [sic] wouldn't have been wrongly figured if he had been thought of as holding in one of his pocketed hands the end of a long, silken halter looped round her beautiful neck." (James 2001: 523) Person also confirms that this visualization of James's metaphor, (interestingly in accordance with Veblen's theory,) in the adaptation of *Bowl* "reinforc[es] the economic basis of their marriage and acknowledg[es] his [Adam's] authority." (2002: 32) In the case of *Portrait* it is Isabel's money, but it is clearly Osmond's taste at the Palazzo Roccanera 'at home', the way he directs the servants, the way in which the dark palazzo resembles his pre-marital home in terms of decoration. Isabel is made to greet the guests, performing the social 'labour' and, as I have explained in a previous chapter, dressed to accord with her martial surroundings and therefore her husband's taste, while Charlotte uses Adam's money to gratify her

own taste, Only after Adam suspects her infidelity does he begin to assert his own taste and will.

Just as Isabel is an addition to Osmond's collection, Charlotte is a specimen for Adam, who in the film warmly describes his series of Raphael drawings as "old friends who can stay as long as they like." James describes Adam as applying "the same measure of value to such different pieces of property as old Persian carpets, say, and new human acquisitions." (James 2001: 179) Adam, unlike Osmond, can only seem to bear a very small number of people he has known for many years around him, and hence he has a tiny social circle, where Osmond sees large social gatherings as a necessity for securing a rich husband for Pansy. Adam's limited ability to cope with social life and other people generally may account for his choosing to marry his daughter's school friend. Charlotte is certainly beautiful and accomplished to the extent that she, in the economy of exchange at work in the society portrayed by James and Wharton, would expect to marry a wealthy man, but she is also entirely familiar to Adam, ensuring he does not have to acquire anyone new in his circle. Both the novel and the adaptation of *Portrait* end somewhat ambiguously, and in a sense *Bowl* does not wrap up Charlotte's story completely either, despite the press reel style footage of Adam and Charlotte's return to American City. Adam overrules her in the end, but we are left to wonder whether Charlotte makes the best of life in American City or whether she suffers, trapped in a provincial backwater. It is the same with Isabel in *Portrait*: Campion ends the film with Isabel at the locked door to Gardencourt, while in the novel Henrietta tells Caspar that Isabel has started for Rome. We do not know what really happens to Isabel after she has her final electrifying encounter with Caspar, whether she returns to Osmond or even Rome.

Portrait and *Bowl*: Campion's influence on Ivory

But *Portrait* and *Bowl* share more than a story line about a woman married to a collector, the adaptations actually share some of the same film techniques. Campion's use of early cinema style sequences in *Portrait* is replicated in *Bowl* in the montage that reflects Charlotte's anxiety about moving back to America, and the sequence that closes the film as Charlotte and Adam travel to American City. While Campion infuses the 'My Journey' sequence with surrealist images to convey Isabel's psychological infatuation with Osmond, Ivory's sequences are much more straightforward: the grainy images of early industrial America contrast sharply with the colourful luxury of the Verver properties, and it is easy to see which one Charlotte prefers. In addition to these shared film techniques, the film adaptation of *Bowl* even makes an explicit reference to *Portrait*'s storyline (Person 2002: 33) when Fanny relates the following over cards:

> Fanny: I had a sad letter from poor Isabel Veinkerfhoff, she's still in Venice with that fearful husband—what's his name?
> Col. Assingham: Felp
> F: I'd love to help her get away from him but what can anyone do? I'm afraid she's made her bed. (…) I used to play whist with the aunt. (…) She told me she warned the uncle not to leave all that money to poor Isabel, as the girl would only fall prey to some dreadful fortune hunter, and of course that's exactly what happened. But what no one foresaw was that the fortune hunter would be an American, rather than the usual impecunious Italian.

This invented reference in the adaptation's dialogue, in addition to the use of early cinema-style sequences show that Campion's film adaptation of James has in turn influenced Ivory's film adaptation of James. Garrett Stewart, in his article "Citizen Adam: the Latest James Ivory and the Last Henry James" has another theory about the use of early cinema techniques: "this is the tendency, often in complete detour from the source text, to encode the photomechanical technology of the film's own process, along with its institutional and social effects, as the ultimate touchstone of the narrative's historical imagination." (Stewart 2002: 7) While I have argued in a previous chapter

that Campion's use of the early cinema technique is clearly an inventive visual condensation of the source novel's text, as well as a homage to early avant-garde images, the sequences in *Bowl* look as if they could be archival footage. The early cinema style sequences in *Bowl* lend the film an illusion of historical fact, while at the same time serving a similar purpose to Campion's fanciful, psychological use of this technique. The first early cinema sequence in *Bowl* is a kind of montage that occurs as Charlotte glances through photographs of American City, confronting her fear and disgust at the possibility of returning there, and in this case the sequence implies Charlotte's emotion, condensing her anxiety in a visual way, but one that lacks Campion's innovative imagery. The images Charlotte sees are ordinary mines and factories, the basis of the Verver fortune, but also the kind of life from which Charlotte wishes to distance herself. Campion's sequence is consciously derived from early cinema, with its jerky movement and sepia tones, but the images are exotic or psychological. The sequences demonstrate a discourse of authenticity: the historical realness of the early cinema, recalling the ability of film and photography to record, and the 'artistic' authenticity of using a purely cinematic effect to convey and condense emotion.

Another way in which Campion's *Portrait* has influenced Ivory's *Bowl* is in Nick Nolte's portrayal of Adam Verver. Nolte's performance echoes that of John Malkovich as Gilbert Osmond. Person remarks "Nolte's casting makes Adam Verver 'an inevitable sexual presence, his sexuality an un-Jamesian, if contemporary, emblem of his aggressive fortune-making'" (2002: 32) Malkovich too transforms Osmond from the "sterile dilletante" (James 2001: 396) into a sadist, a master of emotional blackmail. In the novels, Adam and Osmond are men who are physically non-threatening, and on screen they shift into sinister, almost gothic figures of quiet menace. Part of the reason for this may be simply that a weedy Osmond or a short and somewhat elderly Adam

would be visually unprepossessing. On film, they would not be men who could dominate women like Isabel and Charlotte. But, if Osmond's demanding nature is backed up by Malkovich's sinister guile and Adam's immense fortune and confidence in his own taste are matched by Nolte's distinguished demeanor, combined with echoes of his action-hero youth, then Adam and Osmond become men who are visually, emotionally, and most importantly, cinematically dominant. Both Osmond and Adam are quite misanthropic, in the sense that they lack numerous intimate friends and prefer the company of their young, acquiescent daughters over their glittering, clever wives. In the adaptations, Nolte and Malkovich's performances push Adam and Osmond into the visual realm of the cinematic villain.

The Innocent versus the Knowing Woman

Where Kate Croy, Charlotte Stant, Conchita Closson and Ellen Olenska are knowing cosmopolites, Milly, Maggie, May, and Nan are innocents. In the case of *Bowl*, Maggie begins the story as an unknowing innocent. As Fanny says in both the novel and the adaptation: "there are things, my dear, haven't you felt it…that no one could tell Maggie…she wasn't born to know evil" (James 2001: 94) and the film's dialogue: "there are things in life that Maggie does not—should not know. Don't you feel that? One has to protect her innocence." Maggie believes Amerigo is devoted to her and that Charlotte is her true friend. She has no idea of their past as lovers until she tries to purchase the 'golden bowl' of the title as a gift for her father. When the shopkeeper delivers the bowl, he recognizes photographs of Amerigo and Charlotte as the couple who almost bought the same bowl some years before. This fact proves Maggie's vague suspicions, which James memorably introduces at the beginning of Book II with the pagoda image of "our young woman's consciousness of a recent change in her life." (James 2001: 328)

> This situation had been occupying for months and months the very centre of the garden of her life, but it had reared itself there like some strange tall tower of ivory, or perhaps rather some wonderful beautiful but outlandish pagoda, a structure plated with hard bright porcelain, coloured and figured and adorned at the overhanging eaves with silver bells that tinkled ever so charmingly when stirred by chance airs. She had walked round and round it—that was what she felt; she had carried on her existence in the space left her for circulation, a space that sometimes seemed ample and sometimes narrow (…) but never yet making out where she might have entered had she wished. (…) The great decorated surface had remained consistently impenetrable and inscrutable. At present however, to her considering mind, it was as if she had ceased merely to circle and to scan the elevation, ceased so vaguely, so quite helplessly to stare and wonder: she had caught herself distinctly in the act of pausing, then in that of lingering, and finally in that of stepping unprecedentedly near. (…) [I]t was nevertheless quite as if she sounded with a tap or two one of the rare porcelain plates. She had knocked in short—though she could scarce have said whether for admission or for what; she had applied her hand to a cool smooth spot and had waited to see what would happen. Something *had* happened; it was as if a sound, at her touch, after a little, had come back to her from within; a sound sufficiently suggesting that her approach had been noted. (James 2001: 327-328)

The film also incorporates this memorable verbal description. Just as Amerigo returns late from Matcham and his secret assignation with Charlotte, Maggie tells him she has had a nightmare while he was away. She describes being inside a beautiful pagoda, but when she taps on the wall it makes a sound as if the structure is cracked. She becomes terrified that if she moves the pagoda will shatter and bury her alive, and also that her father will discover she is trapped inside. She then wakes from her dream with the bed sheet stuffed into her mouth. The film's description of the cracked pagoda forms a parallel with the flawed crystal of the golden bowl, the symbolic object around which the entire narrative revolves, a symbol of the outwardly ideal marriages of Maggie and Amerigo and Adam and Charlotte. The pagoda dream foreshadows Fanny's attempt to destroy the evidence of her own guilt and Maggie's terrible knowledge by smashing the bowl (James 448), but of course this does not stop Maggie from confronting Amerigo with her knowledge.

James's description of Maggie's expanding consciousness, the opening of her mind to the possibility of evil, or in fact, merely knowledge, contrasts with the aggressive innocence of May Welland in *Age.*

> So lacking in imagination, so incapable of growth that the world of her youth had fallen into pieces and rebuilt itself without her ever being conscious of the change. This hard bright blindness had kept her immediate horizon apparently unaltered. Her incapacity to recognize change made her children conceal their views from her as Archer concealed his; there had been from the first, a joint pretence of sameness, a kind of innocent family hypocrisy. (Wharton 1986: 348)

May betrays her secret scheming only once, when she confesses to Newland that she lied to Ellen about being certain she was pregnant, shortly before Ellen and Newland were to have a secret assignation. Because of May's pregnancy, Ellen returns Newland's house key in its unopened envelope and decides to return alone to Europe. We are never given access to May's thoughts in the novel or adaptation of *Age* the way we are privy to Maggie's private realizations. May remains, in the eyes of the narrator and the film's voiceover, a person incapable of recognizing change, but one that is nonetheless capable of forming a scheme to seal up a potential 'crack' in her ideal marriage, and maintaining her much vaunted niceness—an image that is quietly punctured by Scorsese's filming of Newland's "terror in the face of [May's] maternal body." (Cook 2001: 163) In the adaptaton of *Bowl,* Maggie's transformation from innocent to knowing woman is revealed in a more explicit fashion. Because of the revelation brought about by the presence of the golden bowl, Maggie sets in motion Amerigo's repentance, and Charlotte's banishment. But she also punishes herself by separating herself from her father, and her son from his grandfather. As Ann Marie Priest remarks "through abjection, she [Maggie] accedes (…) to power, becoming the 'knowing' woman Charlotte had modeled for her." (2001: 164) In the film, Maggie resembles May more closely, she remains a devoted wife, mother and daughter without

a hint of malice, even for her rival. She loves Amerigo so deeply that she not only forgives him, she makes every sacrifice to separate him from Charlotte and Adam.

In the adaptation Maggie acts selflessly but calls herself 'selfish' saying that Amerigo is her selfishness, "I love him so that it's horrible," she tells her father. She may adore her husband, but it is her father's feelings she ultimately wishes to shield with the separation of the two households. It is difficult to decide between the different (competing?) versions of Maggie with which we are presented. James's Maggie has been seen as malevolent, and Margery Sabin explains:

> James marvelously renders her barely suppressed savagery through her inner speech. (…) Maggie's inner speech in Volume Two vibrates with tightly controlled aggression, as she sarcastically parodies the pathetic figure the others have constructed her to be: meager, sick, infantile, nothing more than "the dearest little creature in the world" (23:316) in Fanny's ambiguous reference to her cost as well as her goodness. (Sabin 1998: 216)

The adaptation, particularly Kate Beckinsale's performance, show Maggie to be without malice. She wants her husband's love and her father to remain ignorant of the truth. There is only one moment in the film where Maggie's niceness drops away, when she meets Lady Castledean and remarks, as soon as she is out of earshot, "she has the biggest diamonds and the reddest hair!"[27] to which Amerigo replies he has never heard Maggie say she disliked someone before. Lady Castledean is a trifle vulgar, a little patronizing, and she is openly having an affair with a young Mr. Blint. Maggie has no particular reason to dislike her unless she already realises that Lady Castledean has provided Charlotte and Amerigo's excuse to remain behind at Matcham, ensuring their opportunity for the assignation at Glouchester. Although Stewart remarks that "[Screenwriter Ruth Prawer] Jhabvala has said in an interview that she doesn't agree with Gore Vidal's introduction to the Penguin [film-branded] edition about the

[27] In James Lady Castledean is described by Maggie as "the biggest diamonds on the yellowest hair, the longest lashes on the prettiest falsest eyes, the oldest laces on the most violet velvet, the rightest manner on the wrongest assumption." (360)

malevolence of Maggie and the complicity of her father in the stifling of desire," (2002: 22) there is nonetheless this moment where, as Stewart so aptly puts it "[t]he truth leaks. The text talks." (2002: 22) While the film does not present Maggie as secretly malevolent, this moment of dislike, of an emotion that is not sacrificial, or abject, implies that there is an underside to her niceness. This presentation of a character's niceness that is completely genuine but also has its own secret agenda is strongly reminiscent of May Welland and Winona Ryder's performance as May in the film of *Age*. If we look closely at the character of May and how she acts, one gets the impression it would never occur to May that her deception of Newland and Ellen was wrong, that it was even a plot, it was simply what had to be done to keep her marriage together. She would never admit she successfully deceived her husband and managed the social exile of his suspected lover. May does come close to acknowledging her actions with her deathbed confession to her eldest son about how she asked Newland to give up "the thing [he] most wanted" (Wharton 1986:356) but even this is told in a way that maintains the illusion of what Wharton calls "loving and harmonious households." (Wharton 1986: 348)

Another possible comparison for this adapted Maggie is Lily Bart, another woman afraid to use her knowledge of the truth against her rival, even when it means suffering. Even at the age of twenty-nine Lily is still very much an innocent. She slowly awakens to the realization that she has compromised herself socially to such a degree that she can only be redeemed by exposing the affair of her rival Bertha Dorset with her friend Laurence Selden. Maggie is also a nice, innocent girl who slowly realises that her husband is having an affair with her close friend and stepmother, an affair that not only harms her own happiness, but that of her father. If Lily blackmails Bertha, she can re-enter society and marry a wealthy man, but only by destroying Bertha and Lawrence. If Maggie reveals her knowledge of Charlotte and Amerigo's affair she may lose her

husband, her best friend and her father will be devastated. Lily never uses the letters and disappears from upper class society, eventually dying in a shabby rooming house. Maggie conceals the truth from her father, and confronts Amerigo, who in turn is deeply remorseful and determined to hold the marriage together. Maggie never tells Charlotte that she knows, though Charlotte begins to suspect once Amerigo changes towards her. Maggie urges her father to return to America to work on his museum, knowing Charlotte will have to accompany him, even though it will separate him from Maggie and her son. Maggie even allows Charlotte an angry outburst, where Charlotte tries desperately to save face by telling Maggie it was her idea to take Adam back to America.

'Morceau de musée': Amerigo as trophy husband

The film distances us from the bitter possibilities implied by Adam and Charlotte's relationship just before they return to America by employing a second sequence in the style of an early cinema newsreel, that shows only crates of treasures being unloaded and the Ververs posing for an American press scrum. We are left to imagine what will become of the weakened Charlotte who, as Fanny observes in both novel and adaptation "can't speak or resist or move her little finger" (James 2001: 535) by the end. In the film, Maggie and Amerigo are presented as happy and reconciled, with Amerigo writing a letter to Maggie "like a lover…asking you to keep me," while the novel is deeply ambiguous, ending with an embrace and the words "she had saved herself, and she got off." (James 2001: 569) To my mind, the ending of the novel implies that despite everything Maggie still loves Amerigo, but more than that, she also still desires him:

> He was so near now that she could touch him, taste him, smell him, kiss him, hold him; he almost pressed upon her, and the warmth of his face—frowning, smiling, she mightn't know which; only beautiful and strange was bent upon her with the largeness with which objects loom in dreams. (James 2001: 568)

The above passage describes Maggie's gaze, and it tells us how much she still desires her husband. In the film, Amerigo is played by Jeremy Northam, who also played Mr. Knightley opposite Gwyneth Paltrow's Emma in the 1996 adaptation of Jane Austen's *Emma*, establishing his ability to appear both handsome and imposing in period costume. In *Emma,* Mr. Knightley angrily declares "men of sense, whatever you may think, do not want silly wives," and interestingly in the adaptation of *Bowl* Colonel Assingham remarks of Maggie and Amerigo's marriage "No man of sense would want to be married to an ignorant child." The similarity between these two remarks and Northam's connection to the Austen text cannot go unnoticed. Although it is Maggie that everyone believes to be the 'ignorant child' or 'silly wife' it seems it is in fact Amerigo who is the ignorant, silly husband. When Fanny worries about the social ubiquity of Amerigo and Charlotte in London, thinking they may renew their affair, the Colonel remarks "What in the world did you ever suppose was going to happen? The man's in a position in which he has nothing in life to do." (James 2001: 235 and film) Northam's dashing looks and air of European refinement provide the visual qualities one might expect from a character that is essentially a trophy husband. He has no occupation apart from the restoration of his ancestral palazzo and, like Charlotte, acting as social ambassador for Adam and Maggie. As a 'morceau de musée' for the Ververs, Amerigo not only provides a physical connection to the European past through his royal title, now shared by Maggie and their son (only ever referred to as 'the Principino'meaning 'little prince'), he also helps to build Adam's collection of treasure with his palazzo. Since the palazzo can only be restored with "Mr. Verver's millions," as Charlotte remarks at the beginning of the film, the palazzo becomes a kind of Italian outpost of Adam's far flung art collection. Stewart also remarks on the film's visualization of Amerigo as art object and trophy husband/son-in-law when he presents Adam with a gift just before Maggie's wedding:

> The family heirloom on offer is none other than an impressed medallion imaging the prince's heroic forebear, the navigator Amerigo: almost a coin of exchange in its own right. It is soon passed in eroticized connoisseurship between the hands of the Prince and Maggie as well, before he exits the scene, after having cast a long, self-aware glance at the male *objet d'art* he is becoming. (Stewart 2002: 4) (Figure 88)

The 'male *objet d'art'* that Amerigo looks at, that Garrett is referring to, is in fact a classical Greco-Roman bronze sculpture of a young, naked, fallen warrior, perhaps even a slave, or an athlete. This scene functions as a "literalization of novelistic metaphors" (Stewart 2002: 6) that Garrett describes, in the sense that the scene does visualize James's description of Amerigo as a 'morceau de musee.' But, this scene can also be seen in terms of the influence of Campion's innovative interpretation of Isabel's 'shivering' emotion into a ménage a trois fantasy in *Portrait.* Rather than have Amerigo describe his position verbally—a handsome aristocrat in need of a rich wife—it is all communicated with a glance at another expensive, good-looking object. This scene also comments on Person's theory that the adaptation of *Bowl* reflects on "the consequences of granting women the power to judge manliness and male sexual potency." (Person 2002: 26) The sculpture of the fallen man is one where the head looks downward, while the tightly muscled body is turned and exposed to the viewer's gaze, just as Amerigo's body, having signed a pre-nuptial agreement and set the date for his marriage to Maggie has now more or less been bought by his wife and her father, just as Lily Bart's body would have been a husband's property if she had married. This also aligns Amerigo with the great society beauties like Charlotte and Lily in that they too are poor, and their only way out of poverty is to marry a fortune, to exchange their beauty for financial security. Amerigo's glance at the fallen man sculpture can also imply that there is emasculation in being a man who marries money, recalling those other philandering, impoverished aristocrats Lord Seadown and Lord Richard in *The Buccaneers.*

Amerigo's glance at the fallen man sculpture reminds us that he is the Ververs' museum piece, and the way Jeremy Northam is styled and dressed as Amerigo in the film also recalls another museum piece, John Singer Sargent's portrait *Dr. Samuel Jean Pozzi at home.* (Figure 105) An image of this painting appears in an interview with James Ivory on the Merchant Ivory website about *The Golden Bowl*[28] where Ivory cites the influence of various painters, including Sargent, on the look of the film. This imposing portrait is of an elegant, dark haired man with a neat moustache and goatee (a style of facial hair also sported by John Malkovich as Gilbert Osmond) in a vivid red dressing gown. Pozzi's right hand delicately clasps the top of his robe, lending the pose an air of refinement. Jeremy Northam as Amerigo also wears a groomed goatee, and strongly resembles Pozzi in terms of facial features and bearing. In terms of the adaptation's display of art objects, it is examples from Adam's collection that punctuate the film, particularly his collection of Raphael drawings and an imposing Hans Holbein portrait of Henry VIII (Figure 102). The first art we are really asked to examine, apart from the golden bowl of the title, are the Raphael drawings Adam shows to Charlotte one evening while they are alone at his country house Fawns. After spending time alone with Charlotte, Adam wants to demonstrate his fondness for her by showing her some of his collection. There are five Raphael drawings, but there are four we see in close-up: a lamentation over the body of Christ, a Madonna and child, the head of a young man and what is possibly a depiction of the rape of the Sabine women, an image Charlotte scrutinizes closely. Adam's obvious fondness for the drawings is evident from the way he describes them as "old friends who may stay as long as they like." He tells Charlotte he takes them everywhere he goes, that they make him feel "at home." This contrasts with Osmond's collection which is private and somewhat anonymous. Osmond has no

[28] See "Imagining the Golden Bowl"

great masterpieces and the film glides over the dark rooms that house his spoils. Most of Adam's collection is eventually intended for display. The film makes special use of Holbein's full-length *Portrait of Henry VIII* in the final scenes where Charlotte is acting as tour guide to the collection. In the film, Charlotte comments on the painting to a crowd of spectators, while Adam looks on, quietly menacing:

> I think you will all agree with me when I say that this life-size portrait of King Henry VIII by Hans Holbein dominates all the other pictures in this room. Holbein presents the most striking depiction of royal authority in English art. But to me it's also a chilling portrait of the masculine ego in all its brutal physical strength and hardness. The subject matches the cold hardness of Holbein's style here, which brings out so well the King's defiance of all who stood in his way, including his numerous women, who one by one went to their doom.

Charlotte's description of the painting echoes James's text where Maggie imagines Adam's thoughts on Charlotte: "I lead her now by the neck, I lead her to her doom." (James 524) In this way, the Holbein portrait brings the weight of one English monarch's horrific marital history to bear on that of the adaptation's characters, once more evoking and condensing James's text in a richly symbolic visual representation.

Her description to the crowd of Holbein's "representation of the masculine ego" and the way the camera pans from the foot of the painting to the very top not only conveys the powerful visual impact of the artwork itself, but it also underscores the state of Charlotte's marriage to Adam at the end of the story.[29] The adaptation also uses a long shot (Figure 101) that shows Adam observing Charlotte as she stands dwarfed in front of the immense painting, Nick Nolte's severe expression and stance mirror that of the king in the painting. The film is able to show us the original painting, since it resides in a private collection at Belvoir Castle, where much of *Bowl* was shot. Ivory states openly "we made up the Verver collection out of the real art in the houses where we

[29] Another full-length portrait of Henry VIII appears in Shekar Kapur's *Elizabeth* in a scene where the young queen, played by Cate Blanchett, is struggling to learn how to rule. She kneels in front of this portrait, initially cowed by the demeanour of her male councilors, but soon rises proudly declaring herself to be her father's daughter "I am not afraid of anything," she says. This same painting that symbolizes Elizabeth's strength and heritage, is also the symbol of Charlotte's oppression in marriage.

were shooting, and in some cases we added to that," (Ivory 2000: 2) as with the "series of copies of Raphael drawings." (Ivory 2000: 2) The Raphael drawings represent Adam's personal acquisitiveness, but also his preference for an intimate lifestyle that excludes much of society. Drawings are delicate and executed on a small scale. Many are not even made to withstand any length of time. To possess and appreciate drawings of such delicacy and beauty mirrors Adam's preference for a small social circle and the intimacy of his relationship with Maggie and the Principino. On the other hand, the Holbein portrait represents Adam's public image as the billionaire art collector with connections to European royalty and the beautiful young wife. These two examples of art in the film adaptation reflect the extremes of Adam's personality.

The oriental ballet and the return of the repressed

A final interesting example of an artistic influence that is present only in the film is the oriental ballet sequence. The novel shows the same activities and dialogue taking place at a dinner party, while the adaptation places them around the performance of the ballet. From a historical perspective, the story of *The Golden Bowl* is set too early to encompass the influence of the Ballet Russes *Schéhérazade*, but it is clear from the middle eastern costumes of the dancers in this scene that the Ballets Russes is indeed the visual and narrative influence for this interlude, as illustrated by Bakst's 1909 drawing of *Costume of Cleopatra* (Figure 106). In his article "Out of the Past: Fashion/ Orientalism/The Body" Peter Wollen offers an illuminating description of the Ballets Russes' performance of *Schéhérazade* which debuted in Paris in 1910.

> The spectacle of *Schéhérazade* was freely devised to fit Rimsky-Korsakov's symphonic poem. It displayed the fantastic scenography of 'Oriental despotism' in concentrated form. In Act 1, the Shah, refusing the entreaties of his favorite, Zobeida, and the attraction of three odalisques, leaves on a hunting expedition. In Act 2 the women of the harem adorn themselves with jewels and bribe the eunuchs to admit black slaves (wearing rose and green costumes and covered with body paint). Finally Zobeida bids the the Chief Eunuch open a third door to release the Golden Slave (played in Paris by Nijinsky). Dancing girls

> inspire passion and the scene turns into an orgy, all whirling and springing in a frenzied dance. In Act 3 the Shah returns and janissaries with flashing scimitars massacre the women and the slaves. The Golden Slave is the last to die, spinning on his head like a break-dancer. Finally, as the Shah hesitates to kill his favourite, she commits suicide. The Shah buries his face in his hands. (Wollen 1993: 3)

Although the ballet we see in the film of *The Golden Bowl* strongly resembles a condensed version of *Schéhérazade,* there are a few key differences. In the film's ballet, the Shah first appears accompanied by a young boy playing a flute. As his favorite (identified by her crown-like headdress) and other women attendants dance for his entertainment, the Sultan becomes bored, exiting with the young boy and a dismissive gesture to the assembled women. The next scene shows the attendants bringing out a veiled package on a pedestal. The layers of colourful silk are pulled away to reveal a young male dancer, lightly gilded with body paint (a clear reference to The Golden Slave) wearing only a pair of pantaloon trousers and a decorative chain across his chest. (Figure 97) He and the favourite perform a dance of passionate embrace while the other dancers look on, forming various circles and barriers around them. When the Shah returns, he slays all the attendants, leaving the 'golden slave' for last. At her lover's death, the favourite grabs the Shah's dagger and kills herself. The fact that the Shah leaves the dancing in the company of a young child (as opposed to the Ballet Russes' hunting expedition—although this too can be likened to Adam's passion for collecting) can be viewed as a reflection of Adam's preference for his daughter's and grandson's company. Throughout the film Adam appears relatively indifferent to Charlotte's charms, except as a vehicle for displaying his wealth, as he says to her "the whole world must see you, in all your splendour." The favourite's method of bringing out her handsome lover the moment the Shah is away corresponds with Charlotte's renewal of her affair with Amerigo, especially as the ballet party sequence follows that of the Matcham weekend. The Shah's wrath is a foreshadowing of an upcoming scene in the adaptation that shows Adam, Amerigo and the Principino visiting a factory, and then

being chauffered in a car. Adam relates a story of being on honeymoon with Maggie's mother in Paris. A man in a restaurant was looking at his wife in "in a kind of way I really didn't like." Adam became so enraged with jealousy that he "grabbed a knife off the table and rushed over to him," and only his wife was able to stop him. Adam tries to laugh this off, making it into a kind of pleasantry, saying "it was probably just the butter knife…[and] I guess they were all scared of that crazy, wild American." But Amerigo's grave expression indicates that he takes all this very much to heart, especially Adam's comment that if Maggie or the Principino were hurt "I don't know of anything I might not be capable of."

The actions that take place around the ballet, such as Maggie's expression of dislike for Lady Castledean, and Charlotte's fear that Fanny has revealed her affair with Amerigo are secretive and out of character. The exposed secret theme of the ballet coincides with the growing suspicions of Maggie and Charlotte. The characters who watch the ballet express interest or disgust: Charlotte openly enjoys the ballet, while Adam quickly leaves, claiming he does not care for the modern music (Claude Debussy's *Sarabande*). Fanny appears somewhat scandalized, and Lady Castledean's paramour Mr. Blint remarks "it's just like in Hamlet," as they glance behind them at Amerigo. (Figure 98) The sequence does recall the play-within-a-play device employed in *Hamlet*, except of course that Adam does not see the whole ballet. The ballet's explosion of colour, sexuality and the exotic amidst the refined golden colour palette of the Merchant-Ivory film, can be seen as a visual representation of the sexual undercurrent of James's novel. There is certainly a parallel between Merchant-Ivory's reputation for tasteful reserve in film and James's reputation as a restrained high art novelist. Just as *A Room with a View* showed us what was really on the character's minds with the nude bathing scene, the ballet in the film of *The Golden Bowl* is the visual symbol of the return of the repressed subtext of James's novel. The ballet

functions in the same way as Lily Bart's red dress, signaling visually how the rest of the characters, the rest of society in many cases, perceive the protagonists. Just as E.M. Forster might not have condoned the 'bathing scene' in *A Room with a View,* James may not have approved of a racy ballet in his novel, but I like to think they would have enjoyed the visual expressiveness of these sequences and that the complexity and pleasure of these visual representations would prove to be equally compelling condensations of their narrative themes.

The ballet also echoes the salacious frisson of the tableau vivant in *The House of Mirth.* The ballet and the tableau vivant are activities firmly influenced by high art, and appreciated by the upper classes, but they are also slightly scandalous. The souvenir photographs of Charlotte and Amerigo taken at the Lancaster House costume ball also have this quality. Although photography can be respectable, it can also easily facilitate one's undesirable appearance in the media. The exposure of the flash can illuminate much more than one's best side, as Roland Barthes remarks at the end of *Camera Lucida* "such are the two ways of the Photograph…to subject its spectacle to the civilized code of perfect illusions, or to confront in it the wakening of intractable reality" (Barthes 1990:119). In *The Golden Bowl,* it is photographs of Charlotte and Amerigo that finally reveal "the nature and degree of their intimacy under which, in spite of precautions, they hadn't been able to help leaving" (James 2001: 481). In the novel, these photographs are not described, but perhaps they are standard studio portraits of the period. Nonetheless, as the previous quotation from James points out, the shopkeeper has no trouble recalling the emotional intimacy between the two subjects. In the adaptation, the photographs are those taken at the Lancaster House costume ball, showing Charlotte alone, dramatically posed in her Cleopatra outfit, and then with Amerigo, in a pose traditionally associated with married couples: both are in profile, Charlotte is seated, while Amerigo stands with his hand on the back of her

chair. (Figure 92) The pose is evocative of both masculine possession and protection and feminine acquiescence. In both the film and the novel, the Bloomsbury shopkeeper comes to deliver the golden bowl to Maggie. Seeing photographs of Charlotte and Amerigo, he easily recalls their visit to his shop several years earlier and their own debate over whether to purchase the same bowl as Charlotte's wedding gift to Maggie. As the shopkeeper remarks in the film "they are not a couple one can easily forget," cementing Maggie's suspicion of the affair.

Oriental motifs in the film of *The Golden Bowl*

The oriental motifs on display in *The Golden Bowl* in the ballet and costume ball sequences can be linked to a similarly styled oriental-themed evening party in the film adaptation of *The Wings of the Dove* where Kate appears seductively in her peacock cape, and Milly sports an elaborate ostrich plume headdress, all against the backdrop of rooms decorated with lapis lazuli blue tiles, Kate's signature colour throughout the film. While Kate smokes, Lord Mark is drunkenly scandalized that Milly and Kate have that very day visited the erotic section of a London bookshop, "that section of the bookshop is reserved for men," he protests but Milly innocently chides him "But why? Have I suddenly become corrupt?" The bookshop Milly and Kate enter is outwardly respectable, but nonetheless contains a secret inner sanctum filled with allegedly forbidden texts, just as the oriental ballet or the tableau vivant is outwardly respectable, but also reveals secret knowledge and exposes social perceptions. The ballet reveals that a large section of London society know about Charlotte and Amerigo's affair and Adam's cuckoldry. The tableau vivant reveals Lily's figure, and exposes her to impertinent comments. The excursion to the bookshop reveals Kate's position as a source of corruption and Milly's susceptibility to her influence.

Gaylyn Studlar, in "Out-Salomaing Salome: Dance, the New Woman and Fan Magazine Orientalism" traces an important link between orientalist images of dancers in the early twentieth century and the early cinematic figure of the vamp:

> [T]he Ballets Russes' inversion of sexual power was accomplished in large measure through visual presentation, such as in *Clêopatra*, where Ida Rubinstein's towering presence was dramatically contrasted with Nijinsky's feline "Golden Slave." In the Ballets Russes and other dance formats, brutal sensuality began to be associated with a female figure. That figure was translated into film as the orientalized vamp who came to represent the "New Woman." (Studlar 1997: 116)

In the context of Studlar's remarks, Charlotte's Cleopatra costume takes on even greater significance. Not only does the costume link her with the historical figure of Cleopatra and her many literary, theatrical and cinematic antecedents, all famed for their power and sensuality, but this costume, in tandem with the later oriental ballet sequence serve to consolidate Charlotte's cinematic identity as a femme fatale. Studlar's description of the Ballets Russes staging, with Cleopatra towering over her male slave recall Charlotte's elevated position on the staircase at the Lancaster House ball, as she glances proudly down at Amerigo, as he climbs the stair to join her. Charlotte's position as the desiring woman, although hinted at before, is consolidated by this scene. Throughout the costume ball sequence it becomes evident that Charlotte is the great social diva of her set. It is her desire to wear a provocative costume, to be escorted by Amerigo, and to have their photographs taken. Later, when she and Amerigo recommence their affair, it comes as no surprise that it is at Charlotte's insistence. When the ballet sequence takes place, it mirrors Charlotte's position as that of the queen, the desiring female, who takes a handsome lover. Amerigo is the 'feminized' male, the prince who is chosen as the queen's lover. Adam is in turn another feminized male, feminized because of his cuckolded position in relation to Charlotte. By couching these themes in the context of an exotic, 'morally disordered' east, Charlotte's desires are displayed (literally) as disruptive, foreign, and punishable. This is of course exactly what happens to Charlotte.

Exiled to the cultural backwater of American City, far from her lover and cosmopolitan life, forced to act as chatelaine to Adam's collection in a dull parody of the social success she has achieved abroad.

Art objects and "the museum world"

Like the other five adaptations, *The Golden Bowl* constructs a careful economy of symbolic objects that represent a visual compression of James's words and themes. Adeline Tintner in "The Museum World of Henry James" has remarked that in the novel "Adam takes the form of art patron with such intensity that the Prince becomes a crystal; Charlotte, Oriental tiles; and even his daughter some 'draped antique of Vatican or Capitoline halls.'" (1963: 153) It is Adam's role as collector that shapes the narrative's treatment of people as objects, and art objects as evocative symbols, qualities the adaptation reflects visually. In the novel, Adam's acquisition of a set of Damascene tiles (James 2001: 191) coincides with his contemplation of Charlotte as a potential wife:

> As it had served him to satisfy himself, so to speak, both about Amerigo and about the Bernardino Luini he had happened to come to knowledge of at the time he was consenting to the announcement of his daughter'sh betrothal, so it served him at present to satisfy himself about Charlotte Stant and an extraordinary set of oriental tiles of which he had lately got wind..." (James 2001: 179)

The film's orientalised vision of Charlotte in her blue and gold Cleopatra costume takes on the same quality as that of the tiles described in the novel: "oh so tenderly unmuffled and revealed...there at last in their full harmony and their venerable splendour...the immemorial amesthystine blue of the glaze, scarcely more meant to be breathed upon, it would seem, than the cheek of royalty." (James 2001: 191) The Cleopatra costume signals Charlotte as a heritage femme fatale, but also represents her status as Adam's social currency; just as her body is on display, so is Adam's wealth. Amerigo is also a symbol of the Verver wealth and social currency, represented in the

adaptation by his gift to Adam: a medallion depicting the head of the ancestor after whom he is named. This condensation of Jamesian description into elements of costume or what Tintner calls the "use of art object as talisman" (1963: 154) recalls Isabel's black and gold dress in *The Portrait of a Lady* and its evocation of James's description of both Isabel's imprisonment and the interior of Palazzo Roccanera. Of course the story of *The Golden Bowl* revolves around a central art object, a large gilded goblet, cut from a single crystal. When Amerigo and Charlotte first see the bowl on their shopping trip for Maggie's wedding present, he sees it is cracked, while Charlotte admires it. Several years later, when Maggie purchases the bowl as a birthday present for Adam, she also fails to spot the flaw. When the shopkeeper delivers the bowl, it is the photographs of Charlotte and Amerigo that cause him to connect all three people to the bowl, and his revelation confirms both Maggie's worst suspicions, and the significance of who can detect the bowl's flaw. Neither Charlotte nor Maggie can see it, but Amerigo discerns it immediately. The shopkeeper, a stranger to Maggie, is the only one who feels she ought to know the truth. Even when Fanny smashes the bowl in an attempt to eradicate its symbolic importance, the knowledge it has revealed sets in motion the separation that ends the story, as Tintner confirms:

> …[A]n object of art itself, a golden bowl, which, first a symbol of Amerigo and Charlotte's adultery, becomes a symbol of the Ververs' deformed attitude to their precious people. For when people are treated like works of art, certain human needs are ignored which will eventually assert themselves and turn the tables on those who possess them. (1963: 153)

The adaptation's deployment of art objects and heritage properties in *The Golden Bowl* may initially feed expectations of nostalgia and what Andrew Higson has called "a museum aesthetic."(1996: 233) Where Higson is pejorative in his use of the term 'museum' to denote "the more select landscapes, interior designs and furnishings conserved by such bodies as English Heritage and the National Trust", (1996:233) Adeline Tintner's famous essay "The Museum World of Henry James" treats the art

objects that appear throughout James's narratives as "giv[ing] out a meaning proper to themselves." (1963: 140) The adaptation's use of Hans Holbein's *Portrait of Henry VIII* perfectly reflects the use of an original work of art held in a real heritage property, woven into the adapted narrative in such a way that its meaning becomes increasingly layered and Jamesian. The painting itself is a full-length portrait of Henry VIII in classic Renaissance style, an image that could easily uphold Higson's accusation of "an elite, conservative vision of the past." (1996: 233) However, the film uses the painting in a powerful way to convey the reversal of power in Charlotte and Adam's marriage.

The Golden Bowl, both the novel and the film adaptation, interrogate this idea of a museum aesthetic of Englishness through its symbolic use of the Holbein painting, as well as the Orientalist motifs present in Charlotte's Cleopatra costume and the ballet. These visual elements represent the film adaptation's problematisation of Higson's notion of a mummified, conservative sense of the past. The film, like James's novels, and the other film adaptations discussed here, revolves around characters who possess global and social mobility, and whose flouting of decorum and privileging of personal desire marks the beginning of the modern world, a world with dissolving borders, and differing degrees of social freedom. It also shares that quality of visual richness with the other adaptations, constructing a symbolic economy of meaning from elements such as art and dress that comprise the eloquent texture of this cycle of films.

Figure 88: Adam, Maggie and Amerigo examine the medallion

Figure 89: Fanny's exotic dress sense

Figure 90: The golden bowl

Figure 91: Charlotte as heritage femme fatale at the Lancaster House ball

Figure 92: Charlotte and Amerigo posing for photographs in a way that suggests their intimacy

Figure 93: Charlotte and Amerigo rekindle their affair

Figure 94: Adam's golden halter

Figure 95: Charlotte in red at Matcham

Figure 96: Charlotte and Amerigo at the inn in Glouchester

Figure 97: The oriental ballet

Figure 98: "It's just like in *Hamlet*"

Figure 99: The photographs that reveal Charlotte and Amerigo's affair

Figure 100: The golden bowl destroyed, the revelation of the flawed symbolic object

Figure 101: Charlotte among Adam's treasures

Figure 102: Hans Holbein's *Portrait of Henry VIII*

Figure 103: The newsreel style footage of Adam and Charlotte's arrival in American City

Figure 104: Sargent's Fumee d'Ambre Gris

Figure 105: Sargent's Dr. Samuel Jean Pozzi at home

Figure 106: Leon Bakst's Costume of Cleopatra (for Ida Rubenstein) 1909

Chapter 8: Conclusion

In the introduction to this thesis, I make reference to Tom Wolfe's notion of "recording the status life" and how both James and Wharton are masters of this in their writing. The details and rituals that make up the fabric of upper class life in America and Europe between 1870 and 1910 are brilliantly articulated in the fiction of James and Wharton. The screen adaptations of three works by each author over a period of eight years, from 1993 to 2000, share this fascination with the status life. The stories discussed here, Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*, *The House of Mirth* and *The Buccaneers* and James's *The Wings of the Dove, The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Golden Bowl*, articulate four great themes: desire, wealth, decorum and social mobility. The theme of desire is expressed in these films and novels as unfulfilled romance, erotic longing and sometimes, sexual passion, as well as the desire for money and social advancement. Wealth is represented most significantly here by beautiful clothes and fine art, as well as splendid parties, travel and leisure. Decorum encompasses the numerous social rules that govern the narrative worlds of the six books and adaptations, and the violations—both accidental and purposeful—carried out by the characters. Social mobility is expressed in the incidents of social movement, whether upward or downward, dictated by the other three themes. I certainly do not mean to suggest that these are the only themes taken up by either these six film adaptations or James and Wharton, but they are the ones through which I have chosen to focus my analysis. The adaptations, like the stories, also share certain visual motifs. All the adaptations demonstrate Stella Bruzzi's concept of costume drama that employs "a covert, codified discourse that centers on the clothes themselves" (1997: 35) and by focusing on clothing and art, the adaptations draw our attention to the symbolic significance inherent in these carefully chosen elements previously regarded only as a frivolous viewing pleasure. In addition to the studied selection of particular clothes and objects, the adaptations also

display a painterly aesthetic that uses a particular artistic style or movement as inspiration for the set, production and costume design--such as the orientalist styling of *The Wings of the Dove*--or places narrative significance on a particular artist's work, as is the case with the Correggios that appear in *The Buccaneers.*

What led to this work in the first place however, was my initial interest in screen adaptations and specifically how so-called classic novels are adapted to the screen. Cinema and television have often been my introduction to classic writers, a fact that would surely infuriate most literary critics. Certainly, I had never read anything by E. M. Forster until I saw and loved Merchant-Ivory's film of *A Room with a View* as a young teenager. More recently, I discovered the work of Rosamond Lehman because I saw the film adaptation *The Heart of Me,* based on her novel *The Echoing Grove*. This early interest in the books behind the adaptations, if you will, has become a serious academic endeavour in the intervening years. Fidelity criticism is interested primarily in what films leave out, and it is this approach that mars much of the criticism of recent James adaptations that have appeared in *The Henry James Review.* But what I have always been interested in is the idea of the book and the adaptatation as texts that are intertwined, but worthy of equal consideration. When discussing screen adaptation, it is almost impossible not to refer back to the book at certain points; but this need not infer a negative comparison of book to screen. Instead, an instance of comparison between a scene in the book and a scene in the adaptation can serve as the springboard for a discussion of how a book will set a scene with pages of description and dialogue, but that in turn the screen adaptation provides a diffusion of visual symbols that can render an equally complex meaning, often drawing on the book's description as a base, or inspiration, but rendered in a visual way. It is via this unconventional comparative technique that I have attempted to dispense with fidelity criticism, and treat both novel and screen adaptation as texts worthy of equal critical consideration. This process of

interpretation between the written and the visual text can be compared to Barthes's concept of the third meaning, "the *passage* from language to *significance* and the founding act of the filmic itself." (1977: 65)

The transcultural aesthetic

Like literary critics before him, Martin Halliwell also employs James as a springboard for forming new theoretical approaches. In this case, he furthers the plural notion of heritage advocated by Goode (2003), Vidal Villasur (2002) and Sadoff (2002) :

> [M]ost of the adaptations of James's transatlantic work clearly cannot fit with the notions of English heritage which Higson argues are central to the audience appeal of British costume dramas. Forster's and Austen's fictions most often represent a 'fragment of England', whereas James is more interested in the clash between three cultures: English, European (most often French and Italian) and American. (Halliwell 2000: 71)

Halliwell boldly dismisses the term 'costume drama' for James adaptations and instead applies the term "transcultural aesthetic for defining both James's fiction and the recent adaptations of it." (2000: 71) The transcultural aesthetic also applies to Wharton, particularly with her final novel, *The Buccaneers*, where the elopement of Nan and Guy represents a symbolic unification of the English and American, as well as an acknowledgement of the rise of the professional class. Halliwell's term is also meant to encompass the increasingly global nature of film production, and the six films under discussion here are, with the exception of *The Age of Innocence,* all US/UK co-productions.[30] For me, Halliwell's application of the term 'transcultural aesthetic' is the most descriptively useful in terms of the six adaptations examined here. Transcultural aesthetic connotes a greater variability in terms of representations of the past than 'heritage,' 'post- heritage' or even "post-national" (Higson 2000: 38) despite efforts to redefine or circulate these three terms. The transcultural aesthetic encompasses a new way of viewing contemporary costume drama that self-consciously engages with issues

[30] The Golden Bowl is a tripartite production between the US, the UK and France. (Higson 2003:264)

of postcoloniality, sexuality, feminism and social mobility as this cycle of films do. The notion of the transcultural or intercultural aesthetic not only encompasses the narrative and stylistic departures introduced in adaptations like Patricia Rozema's *Mansfield Park* (1999) and Mira Nair's *Vanity Fair* (2004) but at the time of writing, a contemporarily set adaptation of James's *The Bostonians* entitled *The Californians* was due to be released.

Shared Inheritances: Citizens of the World

As a result of my work, which attempts to articulate some of the visual and narrative meanings and pleasures of the costume screen adaptation, I have demonstrated that the notion of the past as shared inheritance is very much alive in this cycle of adaptations. Not only do these stories contain characters that essentially predict the increased social and global mobility being experienced in the early 21st century, but many of these characters are what we might now call citizens of the world: they travel freely, are cosmopolitan and sophisticated, frequently multilingual, well-educated, and frequently multinational. The early idea of the citizen of the world is typified, interestingly enough, by some of James's and Wharton's female characters: Charlotte Stant, Serena Merle, Nan St. George, and Ellen Olenska are all representative of this expanded notion of the *flaneuse,* the cosmopolitan woman who moves freely through the metropolis of modernity, and now by extension, the world. Of course, this kind of status is not without expense. Although theoretically the advent of the European Union and cheaper air travel has made geographic mobility within Europe more accessible, this kind of mobility still costs money. However, the idea of pluralistic notions of national identity and the reality of holding more than one passport is becoming increasingly common. While citizens of former British and French colonies were some of the first people to hold multiple passports, this opportunity has since been extended to the children and grandchildren of British and Irish-born citizens who later emigrated

to Canada and the United States. We do not even need to imagine *The Buccaneers* set today, as we recognize their comtemporaries every time we open a copy of *Harper's* or *Vanity Fair.*

As Halliwell's application of the transcultural aesthetic reminds us:

> [I]n contradistinction to Higson's claim that costume dramas tend to result in 'museum' or 'showcase' pieces, …by emphasizing certain aspects of James's aesthetics the recent adaptations preserve a critical vantage point to deal with such current cultural issues as historicity, nationhood and gender politics." (Halliwell 2000: 72)

The possible critical vantage points suggested by Halliwell for the future of costume drama and screen adaptation can be seen in the 2004 film *Stage Beauty*, based on Jeffrey Hatcher's play, *Compleat Female Stage Beauty.* Billy Crudup's performance as Ned Kynaston, a genetic male trained from a young age to perform the women's roles in Elizabethan theatre, presents us with a character who has essentially undergone emotional and psychological gender reassignment. *Stage Beauty* is an example of how a costume drama, no matter how far it is set in the past, can speak to us about present issues. Set in the 1660s, *Stage Beauty* illuminates the period in which women began to act on the English stage. The tensions are set up between Kynaston the female performer, Kynaston the man without a role (so to speak), and Maria (Claire Danes) Kynaston's dresser who wants to act. By placing this story in the context of the historical past—it begins with a quotation from Samuel Pepys about Kynaston's beauty—within the history of the social marginality of actors, but cultural centrality of popular art, we are treated to a highly contemporary film essay that asks 'what is gender?' 'where does desire come from?' Themes of the aging artist, the nature of celebrity, and the shift to modern theatrical realism are also taken up. As an actor, Kynaston is presented as a kind of pansexual figure, equally enjoying the pleasures of transgender, gay and straight sex.

Importantly, clothes are what transform Kynaston from his uncomfortable masculinity to his well-worn feminine stage presence, rendering him attractive to a pair of slumming women aristocrats, and George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham (Ben Chaplin). Dressed as a woman, Kynaston knows how to behave, but as a man Kynaston is awkward and not a little uncomfortable. Only in the performance that ends the film—the strangulation scene from Shakespeare's *Othello*—is Kynaston able to act as a man (albeit a cruel one), by taking on the title role, with Maria as Desdemona, (the part Kynaston made famous acting as a woman). There is a palpable struggle throughout the film as to what behaviour is appropriate to men and women respectively, and this is amusingly illustrated by the film's sole heterosexual love scene between Kynaston and Maria, which begins as a kind of tutorial in the variety of sexual positions adopted by each sex (with Maria asking throughout 'What am I now?'), which renders both characters increasingly sexually aroused, yet confused. The film ends with Kynaston (Crudup) and Maria (Danes) struggling playfully backstage in their *Othello* costumes, and the film audience is left without the expected romantic declaration. The unanswered questions about sexuality, as well as the physical struggle that ends the film, are symbolic evocations of the continuing struggle for sexual equality.

Mira Nair's adaptation of *Vanity Fair* (2004) engages in a particularly interesting stylistic interpretation of the transcultural aesthetic. Nair's own position as a cosmopolitan, citizen of the world infuses the tale of Beckey Sharpe's rise and fall with an Indian-inspired mise-en-scene taken from her own background and that of the source text's author, William Makepeace Thackeray, also born in India. On the DVD commentary to *Vanity Fair* Nair clearly indicates that much of the Indian details are indicated in the novel's text. In Nair's hands, these details are emphasised even futher, so that Jos Sedley's Bengali waistcoats are transformed in the adaptation into an entire wardrobe of brightly coloured Indian fabrics that constantly mark him as Beckey's

eventual husband. Beckey's extravagantly coloured wardrobe also encompasses Indian motifs and colours that mark her as an outsider, but also hint at her stylishness, deploying India in much the same way as Ellen's Chinese silkgown in *The Age of Innocence* indicates her unconventionality. *Vanity Fair*, like the adaptation of *The Golden Bowl*, also makes use of the middle east and oriental dance to indicate duplicity and sensuality. However, rather than being a mere spectator, Beckey performs in the dance, itself the transcultural product of a Bombay choreographer asked to design a middle eastern slave dance, performed to a song with Arabic lyrics composed by an Egyptian pop star. (Nair DVD comentary 2004) As the star of a private performance danced by women who outrank her socially, Beckey boldly declares her capacity for charm and deception as she flirts her way into the favour of aristocratic men. Unlike Lily Bart's appearance at the tableau vivant, in this adaptation, Beckey remains entirely aware of her projected image as an odalisque.

Another particularly intriguing example of literary adaptation is the 2003 Korean film *Untold Scandal (Joseon namnyea sangyeoljisa)*, mining the heretofore undiscovered transcultural aesthetics of the eighteenth century French novel by Choderlos de Laclos, *Les Liasons Dangereuses*. The same attention to etiquette and personal adornment, and decadent eroticism that permeate de Laclos's epistolary novel and Stephen Frears' 1988 film are also at work in Chosun dynasty Korea. Madame Jo, the Mme. De Mertueil character, is exacting revenge on her husband for taking a young concubine, rather than an old lover who decides to marry a young girl. Her instrument of revenge is her cousin Jo won, *Untold Scandal*'s incarnation of the womanizing Vicomte de Valmont. The devout Madame de Tourvel that Valmont attempts to seduce, and then falls in love with in *Liasons*, in *Untold Scandal* is Suk, a young woman whose fiancé was killed just before their marriage. She remains faithful to her fiancé even after his death, out of respect for his memory and family. Suk is also secretly a Christian, a

religion that must meet in secret during the Chosun dynasty, making the attentions of a known seducer doubly dangerous. *Untold Scandal* presents fascinating possibilities for study with regard to theories of textual translation and cinematic adaptation.

Rather than English language versions of European films such as 2004's *Wicker Park* (based on the early 90s French film *l'Appartement*), or cross-cultural productions like *Death in Venice*, (a German novel set in Italy made into and English-language film by an Italian director), will we see more of this type of adaptation? Reinterpretations of European and North American texts adapted for the screen in a language other than English, for non-Western cultures. One example of this is the relatively long tradition of transposing the work of Shakespeare into different temporal settings, as well as different languages and cultures. Esha Niyogi De writes about Indian adaptations of *Hamlet* and argues:

> In the obvious sense, they [Indian filmmakers in mid-twentieth century Bombay] copied the British sources, and profited from the desire inculcated in English-educated producers and consumers to amass cultural capital. But in the imitations they also interwove traditional narrative and cinematic techniques. (2002: 21)

More recently, Indian directors like Shekar Kapur and Mira Nair have used their own cultural position to comment on British history and source texts in ways that also incoporate 'traditional narrative and cinematic technique.' The'adaptability' of Shakespeare is often attributed to his eternal themes, and although there have been a few projects that have attempted to tackle Shakespeare within a transcultural aesthetic, this is still a critically untapped field in terms of film studies. In this spirit, I ask you to imagine Wharton's *The House of Mirth* adapted into a film set amongst wealthy Iranian expatriates in New York City in the 1980s. Lily would become Layla, the tableau vivant a risqué appearance in a short independent film. Selden would become a struggling filmmaker. Gus Trenor would remain a lecherous stock broker, with Layla as his junior associate. Wharton's clash of money and virtue would take on a significance that is both

contemporary and controversial. An adaptation like this, rather than maintaining a critical perspective on the past, would allow us to examine our present.

Internationally successful films have been emerging from the Far East for a long time, particularly from Hong Kong and Japan, and more recently Korea and Thailand, but we are now seeing the cinema of Mexico and South America, and the cinema of the Middle East emerging to a wider, global audience. Interestingly, in one of the rare English language books on Middle Eastern cinema, Ibrahim Fawal informs us that the Méliés Brothers films were shown in Egypt only one year after their Paris debut, giving rise to an active domestic film industry. Although some of the most well-known Egyptian films have been adapted from Arabic literary classics, there remains little English-language research on middle eastern cinema and nothing about the process of adaptation from novel to screen in this context. Postcolonial and third world cinema, particularly the examples that reach a global audience, are often preoccupied with the political and social plight of their populace. They tackle poverty, organized crime, religious intolerance, sexual inequality[31]. Their past is often the colonial past, the pre-revolutionary past, which may account for a reluctance to depict the past on screen. In this context, one nation's nostalgia may be another's age of corruption. But if these are nations acknowledged for the richness of their literature, surely adapting a nation's great literary narratives—or even bringing another nation's classic literature to the screen—will be of interest to us all. A comprehensive study of adaptations of works in translation, or foreign language adaptations, such as the adaptation of Arabic novels into films, would both be deeply interesting directions for future adaptation research.

What I have attempted to do here is to introduce the notion of the film and novel as texts of equal importance in the field of adaptation studies. By treating the novel and

[31] Recent examples include *Amores Perros* (Mexico 2000), *City of God* (Brazil 2003) and *Carandiru* (2004), Iran's *Silence between two thoughts* (2004), Afghanistan's *Kandahar* (2002).

the film or television adaptation as texts which are intertwined but equal, I hope to have effectively argued against fidelity criticism as a viable mode of analysis, while still maintaining the importance of comparison between the novel and adaptation in key instances. I have also articulated the visual richness of the symbolic economy of these six costume films, particularly through the theories of Stella Bruzzi and Pierre Bourdieu. The ways in which these six films employ art and dress, and how they conform to Wharton's key concept of the symbolic economy as a 'hieroglyphic world' are especially significant. I have also addressed the shifting definition of what constitutes heritage cinema and demonstrated that this cycle of films represents a more diverse vision of the past, one that employs a transcultural aesthetic, inflected with the notion of heritage as shared inheritances.

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